

Just for Stamps

The Life of George Woodfull Stevens

1929–2011

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Foreword

My father began his memoirs in 1993. And again in 2009. He may have begun the second draft having been unable to find the first draft. His computer-based record keeping was certainly erratic. Since his death, I have trawled through stacks of papers and floppy discs to unearth everything that he kept. Some electronic files (in a multitude of different formats) were represented in printouts or published books. Some printouts were represented in electronic files. But there was little overlap. The net result was that a lot of his output was present in one form or the other. But a lot remains missing and has had to be guessed at.

Both times George began his memoirs, he got half way and then got distracted by something more interesting. But in isolated essays, correspondence with friends, relatives and strangers, jotted notes and faded faxes, I found almost enough to piece together his whole life. I was able to fill in the blanks since his employment by IBM in 1961 on account of having been there for most events. I am grateful to my Uncle Bob (Robert Martyn) for filling in many gaps. I also want to thank Sara Smyth-King, a friend of Jenny's, for letting me include her interview with George that formed a component of her degree. And we are all lucky that UNSW invited George to be interviewed for the *Australians At War* archive and then transcribed it. Much of what George tells in both the memoirs and the interviews he never mentioned to us.

Rather than try to knit together both memoirs into a coherent narrative, I have presented them as written, in parallel, to let George tell his own story.

"Just for stamps" was a favourite expression of George's.

Matthew Stevens, Thornleigh NSW, August 2019

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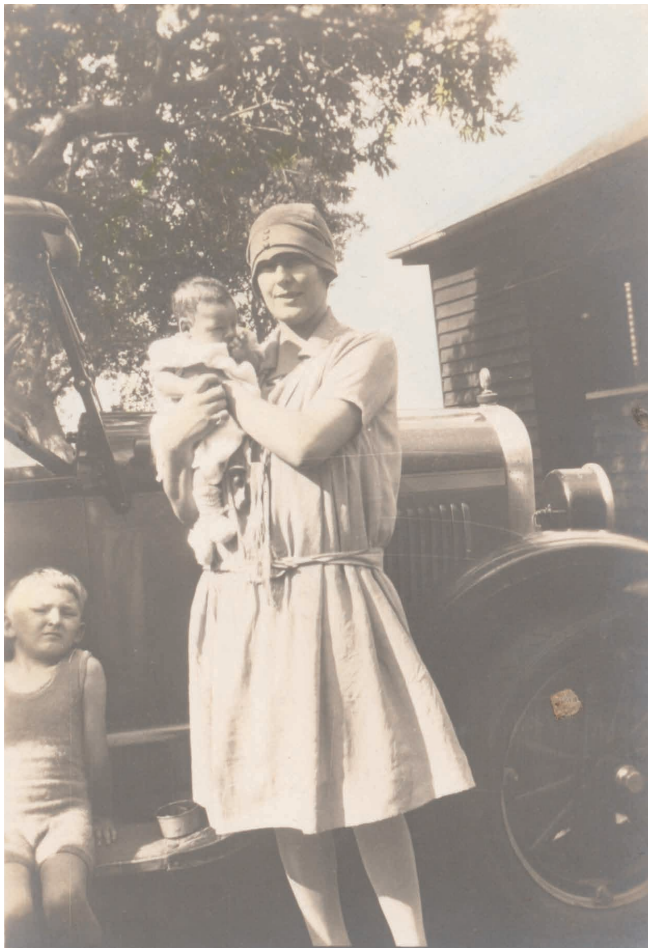
Marginal Notes (if any)	Column.	
	1 Number in Register ..	13209
	CHILD. 2 When and where born ..	10 February 1929 Bradshaw Street, Wooloowin
	3 Name, and whether present or not	~~GEORGE WOODFULL~~
	4 Sex	Male
	PARENTS. Father— 5 1. Name and surname ..	1. Frederick William STEVENS
	2. Rank or profession ..	2. Chief Engineer
	3/4. Age and birthplace ..	3. 31 years 4. Camberwell, Victoria
	6 1. When and where married	1. 17 May 1923, Morven, Victoria
	2. Previous issue living ..	2.—Living years. Richard William 4
	3. Deceased	4 Deceased.
	Mother— 7 1. Name and maiden surname	1. Cecily Woodfull formerly Pescott
	2/3. Age and birthplace ..	2. 28 years 3. Morven, Victoria
	INFORMANT. 8 Signature, description, and residence of informant	Certified in writing by C.W.Stevens, Mother, Tenth and Fifth Avenues, Windsor
	WITNESSES. 9 1. Medical attendant ..	1. Dr. Kerr Scott
	2. Nurse	2. Nurse England
	3. Names of Witnesses ..	3.
	REGISTRAR. 10 1. Signature of Registrar ..	1. G. Porter
	2/3. Date and where registered	2. 20 February 1928 3. Brisbane
	11 Name, if added after registration of birth	

I, GEORGE PORTER, Registrar-General do hereby certify that the above is a true Copy of an Entry in a Register of Births kept in the General Registry Office, Brisbane, and I further certify that I am a person duly authorised by law to issue such Certificate.

Extracted this 4th day of December 193 7

Examined by

Registrar-General.



The earliest known photo of George, February or March 1929, with Cecily and Dick.

Preface 1993

Some people from time to time get the urge to write an autobiography. A few actually do it. Reasons for wanting to write vary. My reasons are that I want to be able to pass on to my descendants something of their own origins. Now why would they want that? Perhaps the majority won't, or will be casually interested only. But there could be one who would really like some answers to the questions I had: "Who were these people who in the past lived, thought, loved, fought, played, worked, feared, exalted, and through these experiences determined the genes that made me what I am?"

By recording some of my own experiences and what I know of my forebears I will help an interested descendent avoid some of the frustrations I had whenever I queried my relatives about our family history. The responses I got to my questions were typically "You don't need to know that" and "What on earth do you want to know that for?" Usually such expressions were delivered with a patronising smile suggesting that I was a little odd. A few were quite co-operative such as Dad's sister Aunty Rubie. Much of what I have on the Stevens and Daws families came from her and for which I am very grateful.

As with every living soul on this earth, I have had hurts, disappointments, failures. In this text I intend to ignore most of them. To focus on them would make for dreary reading, and those I do include have been done so with a particular purpose in mind in each case. For the majority of the text I want to focus on the happy, humorous, and positive aspects of my life.

Over the years I have collected a little hard data and some lore about my predecessors and related people. I have yet to examine and catalogue this, and perhaps in putting together this document I will organise that information formally. Up to now at the age of 64 I haven't made the time to devote to that task. I have always been busy doing other things. Now that I am slowing down my life experiences I will have no excuse not to get on with researching and recording of my own and family histories.

As I compose this, the year of 1993 is drawing to a close. Although I firmly intend carrying on for at least another 20 years, there may be other events in store for me. So with the best of intentions to record some things of interest to those who follow me, the following pages may be of interest.

Greenwich NSW November 1993

Postscript 2001

It is now Australia Day 2001, some 7 years after writing the above words. My, how time flies! In those 7 years I have made some progress towards finalising this recorded history, but if I don't get on with it, it certainly won't be finished before I am finished.

Preface 2009

From time to time over the years I have considered writing my life history, but because of a lack of defined objective, have never got around to it, until now. The catalyst for the work to start now in April 2009 was a conversation at lunch with a couple of old Navy mates, one of whom challenged the other two of us to "get cracking", because he figured that both of us had something to record for posterity. Having mulled this over in my mind for a few weeks, I decided that such a project might be of interest, perhaps even value, to my descendants.



Dick and George in Brisbane.





1933 to 1937, Earliest memories

I was born 10th February 1929 in a hospital in Wooloowin, an inner suburb of Brisbane, and spent the first 5 years of my life living in a large house on the corner of 5th and 10th Avenues in the adjacent suburb of Windsor. This was a typical Brisbane house, the foundations of which were tall thick tree stumps such that there was head high access under the building. There was a big wide verandah across the front, and front door access was via a flight of steps. Because the block of land sloped to the front, rear door access was almost at ground level. This was fortunate because the toilet was an outside dry pan, and access to it in the middle of the night for the adults would have been easy.

These were the Depression years, and whereas now I recognise how tough it was for families to survive, not just live, we did not know any different and thought our life was quite normal.

Here are some very early memories. Being forcibly held down on the kitchen table while a doctor put a gauze mask over my face and sprayed the mask with chloroform prior to him removing my tonsils. Then there was the occasion when my mother found me hiding behind a door one day as I sucked the dead heads of burnt out matches. There must have been something lacking in my diet. Another incident was getting great enjoyment out of being carried from a bedroom to the kitchen inside a large suitcase by my grandfather James Richard Pescott visiting from Melbourne, and hearing Granddad and my mother having a forced loud conversation, for my benefit of course, about where the rubbish in the suitcase should be dumped. More traumatic was being flung off a chair on which I was standing onto the floor as I put my finger into a live electrical light socket.

1932 to 1938

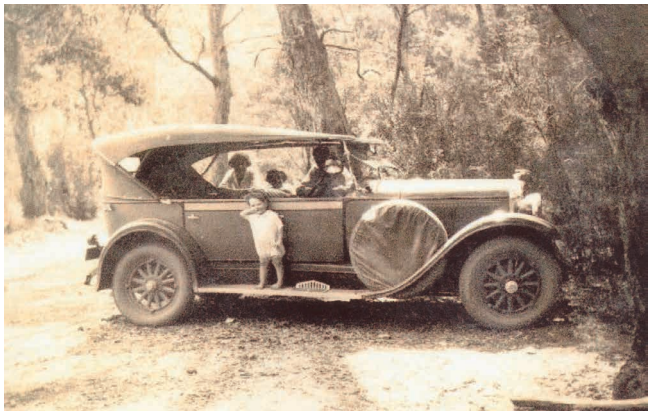
This section covers the period between 1932 and 1938. The anecdotes are not in strict chronological order, and tend to hop about a bit in time as memories come back. In writing these following notes, I have found it fascinating that as I write of one situation I am reminded of others that apparently I had long since forgotten.

Windsor, a suburb of Brisbane in Queensland, was where I first became conscious of the world. Mum (Cecily Woodfull née Pescott), Dad (Frederick William) and older brother Dick (Richard William) were the people I began to know first of all. We lived in a typical Brisbane house on stilts on the corner of 5th and 10th Avenues. The house was demolished in about 1934 when the land was purchased by the management of the hospital next door to make space for enlargement of hospital facilities.

The house had a high verandah looking down on to both avenues. Across one of them lived Mr and Mrs Fox with their children Deirdre, about 2 years older than me, and Billy, my age. Billy and I were buddies. Across the other avenue lived the Tippings. Don't remember much about the family except Bobby, who was a year older than Billy and I. Bobby was almost a superman, although Superman had not been invented in 1933 [created in 1938]. He could throw a ball in the air over the electric light wires while at the same time making a fantastic trilling noise with his tongue. Billy and I couldn't get anywhere near the wires let alone make this important noise. Bobby had his own set of carpenter's tools on a shadow board. The Tippings also had a *Macadamia* tree in their front yard, and they kept chooks. They were patently rich and important



Janes and Ettie Pescott with Dick in 1925.



The Oakland 6 tourer.



Right: Frederick William Stevens, ca. 1934.

On the other side of 5th Avenue lived the family Fox. Billy was my age and we were good pals. On the other side of 10th Avenue was the family Tipping. Bobby was a year older than Billy and me, and of course was a respected authority on all matters. The Tippings had chooks, and I can still smell the pungent aroma of pollard and bran being mixed in hot water for chook feed. On Bobby's first day at school, Billy and I were in Bobby's mother's kitchen to say goodbye for this momentous adventure. Mrs Tipping cut and wrapped his sandwich for lunch, then added a slice of cake for his "laveners" – my interpretation of elevenses or morning tea. There and then I had ambition to grow up so that I too could go to school with laveners.

Grandfather James Pescott and Ettie Amelia née Woodfull, his wife, lived in Melbourne. He was a retired senior public servant, and compared with much of the population was relatively wealthy. He had an American car, an Oakland 6 tourer. James and Ettie visited us in Brisbane once by driving their car on what must have been mainly unsealed roads for about 1500 km each way. Quite a trek considering that there were no motels. Each night on the road they would pitch a tent and sleep under the stars. As no one in our vicinity owned a car, the sight at our house of those large headlight glasses and the magic red tail lights was almost beyond comprehension. And the smell of the leather upholstery conjured up visions of untold luxury.

I remember only three incidents at Windsor State School. One was being sent back to the classroom at lunchtime for allegedly shouting while we were required to sit quietly and eat our sandwiches outside. It was not me but another infant who shouted. So I sat in misery all through the lunch break not daring to eat my sandwich in people. Whenever I smell bran or pollard, I think of Grandma Tipping sitting in the backyard mixing up the chooks' meal.

I remember the day Bobby started at school. Billy and I were there to see him leave for this adult venture. He would have been 4 and we 3 years old. Bobby's mother was preparing his lunch and told us that she was enclosing a special treat for his "laveners". While I didn't know what laveners were, I did know that when I grew up and went to school I too would have laveners. It was a long time later that [I realised that] while I heard her say "laveners" she was saying "elevenses".

One day when I was in the infants' school at Windsor, I proudly took along a toy revolver, probably made of some cheap cast metal. This was enviously examined by a small boy who dropped it on the concrete with the inevitable consequences. It smashed. I was mortified and called on Bobby to remedy the situation by belting this kid who by then was trying hard to make himself invisible. It was then I realised that Bobby was not of the gods, but just human. He declined to take any punitive action against the miscreant, and sauntered off to play with his own cobbers.

When in kindergarten, we were asked to bring to school paper bags containing sugar – for what specific purpose I do not remember, but possibly for the mums to make cakes and toffees for a school fete. I was walking to school with Deirdre and Billy when I decided that my contribution was so inferior that I would be laughed at, and I became embarrassed by this to the point where I suddenly said, "I have forgotten something. I'm going home." This I promptly did, left the unfortunate bag of sugar on the front steps, and returned to school. At school I became even more



Cecily, Dick and George in Brisbane.

the classroom. When the class reassembled after lunch, this wretched woman teacher laughed when she saw me sitting there with my uneaten sandwich on my lap, and remarked, "Oh, I must have forgotten about you."

As happens every year, there are some children who are at the high end of the age range for entry into the first year, and there are others who are at the low end. Being born in February, I was just 4 years of age when I first went to school, and I found it bewildering. One afternoon I can recall sitting frozen in the classroom. The teacher had asked a question, and told us, "When you know the answer, come and whisper it to me, and you can leave school early." I was last one to leave the classroom, still without having a clue to the answer. Then there was the time that I had a prized toy which was a cap gun which I foolishly took to school. Another boy took it from me, dropped it and broke it, then ran away. The most ignominious and embarrassing incident happened one day when the teacher had us standing in a circle as we carried out some sort of activity. Apparently I had developed a case of diarrhoea, and loose faeces ran down my leg. Immediately the smell became apparent and the teacher asked who was causing it. I remained silent hoping that things would pass unnoticed. The teacher then walked around the back of the circle, saw my predicament and immediately ordered me to go home as I was a "dirty little boy." I cried all the way home. My mother was entertaining a neighbour, and when she came to the back door in response to my repeated knocking, she exclaimed, "Oh my god, he's pooped himself." Two examples of how not to react to a distressed little 4-year-old.

Our house was built on land adjoining some sort of children's hospital. The State Government wanted to extend the hospital and resumed our house. We moved to a house in Mosman Park, and I started school at Cottesloe Primary School. I was in the class of Miss Hall, and I remember her as a kind and gentle teacher. I was embarrassed when it was pointed out to the whole class that Georgie had forgotten to bring his sugar.

I didn't like that school. I can remember sitting frozen with mortification one day as each child was allowed to leave and go home when they came to the front of the class to whisper to the teacher the answer to a question asked. I couldn't even understand the question, let alone postulate an intelligent response. I could see myself as the focus of ridicule because I was last. It didn't occur to me that there would be no one to see my shame, other than the teacher. Another time we had just been seated to eat our lunch in the shelter shed, and apparently had been warned to be quiet. Some kids around me ignored this and started talking and pushing as most kids do. I got the blame and was sent back into the class room for punishment – and was forgotten by the teacher. When the others returned after lunch she discovered I was still there, hungry because I was too frightened to eat, and miserable at being unjustly accused. Instead of comforting the patently unhappy little wretch, she chastised me for not eating my lunch, and as further punishment for not eating, kept me in for 10 minutes after school.

There were good times, however, like the day we had a visit from someone who talked about eating the right foods, and gave all of us a strawberry each. I think it took me an hour to slowly demolish my very first strawberry.

Big brother Dick received a present of a second-hand tricycle. He must have been around 7 and I 3. Photos were to be taken to mark the occasion of this significant event. I had a fixed notion that it would look dashing if I, dressed in elastic hemmed rompers, stood on the rear axle while Dick sat on the seat. Amid tears



'Westfield', 88 Eskdale Road, Caulfield, early 1930s.

pand the premises, and compulsorily acquired our land, forcing us to move. On the day of the move I was told not to come home, but remain at school where I would be collected and taken to our next house in Wooloowin. It seems I forgot, went home, and on seeing the house open and empty, I thought I had been abandoned. Fortunately my mother predicted this might happen, and arranged for Bobby Tipping's older sister to anticipate my arrival and look after me.

Dad was employed as a radio engineer at one of Brisbane's radio stations – 4QG I think. The studio was in the city, and the transmitter and aerial were at Oxley, a Brisbane suburb just 12 km to the SW of the city, but in those days quite rural. One of Dad's tasks was to switch on the transmitter and check its operation early in the morning. In order to travel quickly from Windsor to Oxley Dad was provided with a motor cycle. In those days the bike's petrol tank was sandwiched between two horizontal upper bars of the steel frame. On Saturday mornings, the highlight of my week was to be sat on a pillow which was placed on top of the petrol tank, so that I could go with Dad to the butcher's shop for the week's supply of meat. Dad prided himself that he knew every cut from beef and lamb. Can you imagine that today? To see a 4-year-old child balanced on a cushion on top of a motor bike as it was ridden along the road would be unthinkable.

The meat was cooked immediately upon arriving home, and when cool was placed in the Coolgardie safe. Domestic refrigerators were almost unknown, and only the well-off could afford to buy blocks of ice for their ice chests. Because of the hot days and high humidity, milk was also similarly treated. The milkman would arrive each morning with his horse-drawn cart carrying big

of chagrin, I was forcibly removed from the tricycle's axle. I sulked for a long time about that, not for the reason that I wasn't allowed to do what I wanted to do, but for the reason that "they" couldn't recognise a brilliant idea when it confronted them.

Mum's parents, James Richard Pescott and Ettie Amelia née Woodfull, lived in the Melbourne suburb of Caulfield, at 88 Eskdale Road. They drove their car, an Oakland 6 I believe, to Brisbane on rare occasions to stay with us. One evening they babysat while Mum and Dad went out somewhere. I can remember flinging myself on the front verandah and stretching my arms through the timber uprights of the railing telling the neighbourhood at the top of my lungs all about my wicked parents. Not for a moment did I think they were deserting me, but it was just not on that they should go out and leave me behind.

That car journey in those days, early 1920s, was quite an adventure, and mainly on unsealed roads. One of the hazards was that of swaggies jumping on the running board begging for handouts. Despite that, camping on the side of the road overnight was quite safe. The alternative was hotel accommodation (motels were still many years away), and "nice" people didn't stay in country pubs. That car was pure magic. It had huge headlights, a tail light of mysterious red, and a smell of leather upholstery that I can still recognise. Only the well-off had cars in Windsor, and consequently there were no garages, so Grandpa used to secure his car overnight with a horse in some stables at the end of the road. I was just a baby on one of these trips from Melbourne to Brisbane (how I got to Melbourne initially is not known to me). Apparently the car ran into heavy rains and was washed by the flood waters off the road into a swollen creek. Fortunately it became





Cecily, Dick and George in Brisbane. The cat was called Loppy on account of a lopsided ear.

galvanised steel containers of milk. He would ladle the milk out into the billy cans which would be left on the front porch or gate – providing the few pence were left with a note stating the required quantity. No pennies meant no milk. The housewives would retrieve the milk as early as possible, then pour it into a saucepan and boil it to prevent it from curdling and becoming rancid. The good thing was that the boiling process left a thick film of cream on top of the milk, which when spooned on top of a piece of bread and butter was delicious.

Interestingly, my parents had some equity in the Windsor home, but this was the only one during their married lives together. Our next five abodes were all rental properties.

At some stage, I don't recall exactly when, grandfather James Pescott paid the train fares for mother, my older brother Dick and me to travel to Melbourne for a holiday. I only remember two events of that journey. One was seeing small groups of people in the country standing alongside the railway line shouting out "Paper" as we passed by. These were Depression victims catching rabbits to eat and the pelts to sell in order to supplement their dole money, anxious to get some news of the outside world. They were too far from regular sources of newspapers, and probably couldn't afford to buy them anyway.

Our next home was in Wilmington Avenue Wooloowin. From here each day I would walk to Windsor State School, and walk home again, possibly 3 to 4 km each way. In this 21st century, no 5-year-old child would be required to do this, but in those days it was quite safe. Wilmington Avenue runs off Chalk Street which in turn runs off the major Lutwyche Road. Just along Chalk Street from our home was a bakery where the bread wedged against a tree from which it was towed the next day by horses of a nearby farmer. I'm told that on arrival in Brisbane, the entire sodden contents of the suitcases were so mouldy they were simply dumped on the rubbish heap and burned.

A popular toy for boys was a little wooden horse with a hole drilled through its rumps, and a two-wheeled cart with the same sized hole drilled through the front end of the two shafts. The cart was attached to the horse with a removable wire pin inserted through one shaft, the horse and then the other shaft. The novelty was the ability to hitch and unhitch the cart to and from the horse. My "rig" was bigger than Billy's, which naturally made me the leader of all explorations we made into the deserts and mountains.

Dad took me somewhere on the local steam train once. As we neared our station coming home I wanted to hold the train tickets. It was important that I show other travellers and station staff that I was well versed in the ways of adult behaviour, and this would certainly be tangible evidence of that. As he gave them to me he warned me to hold them tightly. Of course I didn't, and they fell not only out of my hand but also out of the open train door. I was petrified that we would certainly be imprisoned on the spot for this dreadful crime. Apparently there was no such thing as railway line litter then, for as soon as the train left, Dad hopped down on the line, picked up the tickets and saved us from terrible retribution.

A sound that has not been heard for many years is that of truck horns operated by engine exhaust gas. I am yet to see even a diagram of these devices but as I understand it, by pulling a lever some of the exhaust gas which would normally be dispersed via the exhaust





Dick and George.

was baked in wood-fired ovens. The gorgeous smell from these ovens in the early morning and the jovial faces of the three bakers there have been imprinted on my mind for ever.

Next door to us in Wilmington Avenue lived the Waldron family. Bernadette was my age and her sister a year or so older. This sister had been saving her money for attendance at the forthcoming Brisbane Exhibition. She had a purse, probably small but in my inexperience very large, and it was stuffed with money, all pennies and halfpennies, but to me it was untold wealth. A memory of the Wilmington Avenue home is the perfume of freesia flowers. These days the freesia does not have anywhere near the lovely aroma of those flowers. From Wilmington Avenue we could see the skyline of the city of Brisbane buildings. It looked so far away but is only 5 km.

As previously mentioned, all this was during the Depression years. A fairly regular manifestation of this economic tragedy was to see and hear five or six men with musical instruments roaming the streets playing music, hoping for donations of a few pence.

It was around this time that my father started flying as a Wireless Operator Second Pilot with Qantas.

We did not stay for long at Wilmington Avenue, and moved house in 1936 to a house in Cotton Street in the bayside suburb of Shorncliffe. The almost 3 years which followed here were the happiest of my whole childhood life, and I was devastated when we moved to Melbourne in 1937. Shorncliffe is on Moreton Bay about 17 km from Brisbane and near a bigger town of Sandgate, or as grandfather Pescott used to say, "Mudgate". At Shorncliffe it was standard practice for school children to go barefoot. This was partly convention of living in a semirural area, and partly because in those Depression years, only pipe would instead be sent to something akin to a ship's steam whistle. The resulting noise was a rapid and loud, high-frequency "pop pop pop". I guess it must have been about 1934 when I last heard one of these.

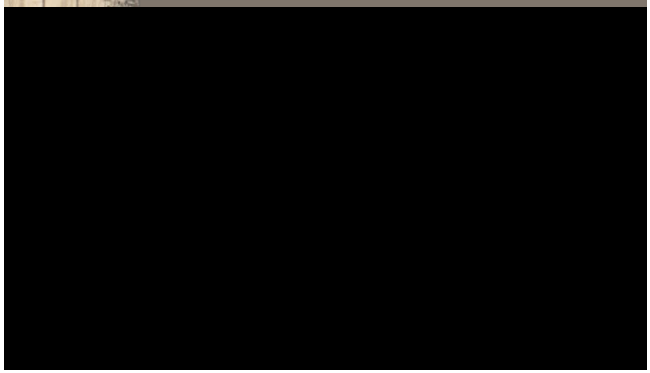
Dad had a motor cycle with the fuel tank sandwiched between an upper and lower frame of the bike. He would get an old pillow, sit it on the top frame over the fuel tank, and take me to the butcher shop perched precariously on the pillow. Almost until the day he died in 1966, he insisted on shopping for the meat. He would pride himself on being able to say to the butcher, and with an air of the accredited expert, "I would like that rolled roast, those chump chops or that skirt steak sliced very thin." In the days when I was still in three-cornered pants, he had a job as radio engineer at a transmitting station at Oxley. To get to and from there he rode his motor bike. His duties required him to shut the transmitter down after the final program at night, and to start it up and test it ready for the first broadcast of the next day. It was easier for him to sleep overnight, and he reminisced occasionally how in the wintertime he would keep warm in the corrugated iron hut which was the transmitter room by supplementing his one blanket with newspapers.

We moved from Windsor to Wilmington Avenue Wooloowin in 1934 when I was 5. The day we moved I came home from school to the Windsor house to find it empty. Clearly I had been deserted and promptly burst into tears. Fortunately, Mum tipped I would do this and a young girl neighbour (could have been a Tipping girl) had been primed to rescue me.

The house at Wooloowin was positioned such that in the distance I could see the outline of some of the city

Dick's trike.





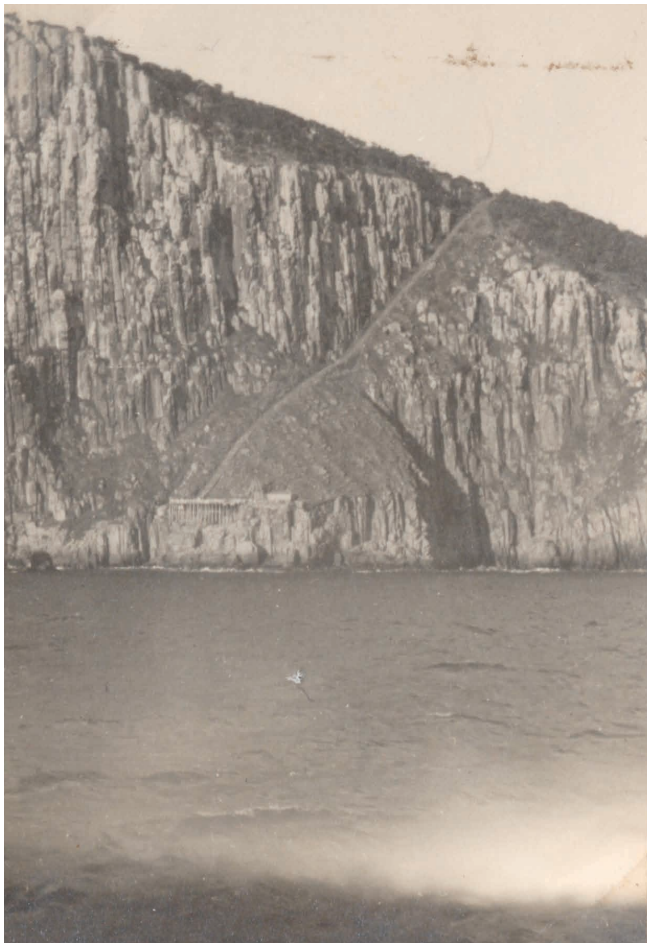
Left: George later got his own trike.

up to the island was stretched a heavy wire. The wire was anchored to a point on Tasman Island about 20 metres above the sea level. Also at this point was a large timber platform. Mounted on this stretched wire was a pulley from which was suspended a large basket which could hold four people comfortably. Something like latter-day hot air balloon baskets. Imagine that the basket is at rest on the platform on the side of Tasman, and that a person say is destined for the *Cape York* lying at anchor some distance away. The person steps into the basket, which is first lifted a few feet off the platform. It is then set in motion down the 30 degree angle of the wire until it comes to rest against a steel block bolted to the wire halfway between the island and the rock. At this point the motor boat stations itself below the basket, which is then lowered vertically into the boat so that the occupant can step out into the boat. Simple in concept but practical only on calm days. I have spent quite a few days in Port Arthur waiting for the sea and wind to abate so that loading/unloading could resume. But this only half the story. To get from the platform to the lighthouse at the top of the island, you had to step into a flying-fox-type wire-pulled trolley which operated at an angle of about 60 degrees from the horizontal. This was about 270 metres in length. Installation of these two devices must have taken a lot of hard work and patience and would have been constantly dangerous.

The lights were fired by a mixture of oxygen and acetylene. We would toil for hours, sometimes days, manhandling the large charged cylinders of gas to the light, and removing the empty cylinders back to the ship. This was by far the hardest part of the work. Moving food supplies, furniture was easy. Occasionally there was livestock to be moved. Sheep were no problem but the occasional cow was literally that – a fair cow.

At anchor in the evenings shortly before our scheduled return to Williamstown we would get out the fishing lines and craypots. Sea produce from Bass Strait in those days was prolific and there simply for the taking. When I look at the crayfish in the markets today I despair for the survival of the species. Any crayfish (lobster) we caught that was less than 30 centimetres in length was tossed back so that it could have a chance to grow up. We could be guaranteed six large crays in the pot next morning. The cook boiled these for us and they would go into the freezer to be carted home a few days later. The fishing lines could be guaranteed to yield 20 pounds of large fish in as many minutes. These were filleted and the fillets frozen also. In 1989 I saw a documentary on TV about a fellow who explored remote areas of the north-west coast of Western Australia. It showed him catching large fish simply by dropping his line and winding it in almost immediately. That was what Bass Strait was like in 1945. Over 50 years later it is nothing like that. How long will it be before all the oceans are bereft of fish? Not long I fear.

There was a magnificent rugged beauty in Bass Strait and around the Tasmanian coastline. Wedge Island, which is near the Gulfs in South Australia, has a beautiful wildness about it. During the war the RAAF had a radar station here, and on our visits there I envied the RAAF fellows who manned the station. They in turn hated the place because of its remoteness from civilisation. One day at the jetty here a rope became tangled around the propeller of the motor boat. The ship's First Mate, Mr MacKenzie, happened to be there at the time and decided that it had to be cut free right at the shaft. He asked for a volunteer to assist, and anxious to boast of my swimming prowess I stepped forward. About



Landing at Tasman Island.



Tasman Island.



Right: The *Cape York* from Citadel Island.

30 minutes later, dressed in underpants only and absolutely blue with cold, we managed to get the prop free. As most of the seamen were avid trade unionists, instead of being feted and admired by them for my courage, I was roundly criticised, but out of the Mate's earshot. In their view, the boat should have been towed by one of the other boats back to the ship, hoisted on board and worked on there by the shipwright, the only person qualified to do such an exacting task. This was not my first encounter with trade union negative attitudes, and I was to see a lot more before I joined the RAN in September 1946.

The boat access to Bruny Island Lighthouse on the southernmost tip of Bruny was in an idyllic little cove. The water there was, and probably still is, crystal clear. It was a safe little harbour and had trees right down to the sandy beach. It was absolutely lovely. There is road access these days, although a four-wheeled-drive vehicle is recommended. I could have quite easily settled there, but of course would have quickly starved as there would have been no work for me.

I think I had five visits to Hobart during my time in the Lighthouse service, and I became very attracted to it. I still am, and were it not for strong family ties in Sydney, Shirley and I would be living there now – despite the cold winters. Even as a lowly deck boy, I was earning very good money, and in retrospect I should have put my earnings towards acquisition of real estate there. Not that there were fortunes to be made, but Hobart is a pleasant place to live in if you like peace and security.

There were four of us deck boys. We would take week-about looking after the seamen's quarters. This included getting the food from the galley at meal times, scrubbing out, making smoko (morning and afternoon tea). Menial work but it had its compensations of pick of the food, and if you raced through your work of tidying up and scrubbing, you could loaf and read a book or talk to the occasional passenger or fish or whatever else took your fancy. Raising the motor boats after each day's work required teamwork. It required the falls (ropes and pulleys) to be hooked onto the boat fore and aft, and the free ends of the two falls to be pulled by two capstans driven by one of the winches. There was the winch driver, one man working the end of each fall, a deck boy at each end of the boat supervising the two blocks hooked to the boat, the coxswain of the boat and the bo's'un, who supervised and directed the operation. A total of seven. The three in the boat could see each other, as could the three on the winch. The bo's'un was the only one who could see everyone else. His role was vital if the boats were to be undamaged and if no human accidents were to occur. Once the boat was hoisted out of the water almost to the top of the falls, these latter had to be temporarily secured so the that long ropes could then be released from the capstans. It was then necessary for the deck boys to attach large eyebolts, which were shackled to the top of the davits onto hooks bolted into the boat at each end. The eye bolts were then screwed up to take the weight of the boat, and then the temporary securing was released. Finally the davits were wound inboard by two men working the hand crank of each davit, the keel chocked, boat cleaned and serviced, and finally covered with canvas and lashed down. On a good day an experienced team could do the whole exercise in about 20 minutes. A combination of inexperience and bad weather could mean an hour. The danger was always present when there was any sort



Cape Pillar.

of sea running. The coxswain would manoeuvre the boat alongside under the falls which had been lowered. When the bo's'un judged the moment to be suitable he would shout "hook on". Each deck boy positioned at either end of the boat would grab the block at the end of the fall and hook it on to the ring bolt in the boat. If a sea was running, the boat would surge up, the blocks would be frantically hooked on, and as the swell passed the boat would be suddenly jerked out of the water with a tremendous thud. It was a sure way to have a finger amputated if you didn't have your wits about you. The boats were big, about 30 feet long, broad and very solidly constructed. Each weighed about 2 tons. The deck boys always had a race to see who could get the temporary lashing on first, but it was under the very critical eye of Mr Eric Mussared, the bo's'un, for whom every act of seamanship had to be perfectly executed, and repeated if not perfect.

Cape York had a naval gun, I think a 12-pounder, mounted on the poop deck aft. It was under the command of Able Seaman Bill Bridgeman. Bill was the typical grizzled old sea dog and a veteran of the '14–'18 war. In Hobart, he used to dress up in his sailor's uniform, go down the gangplank ashore, and with an exaggerated rolling gait along the wharf make for his favourite pub. He used to love his role, which meant that he was employed by the RAN and not required to do any work at all on the ship except polish and oil his gun. He would help at times by driving a winch, but that was it. He had his own cabin on the poop deck just forrard of his gun, and though he chose to eat in the seamen's mess, he could have insisted on his rights and had all his meals brought to his cabin by the duty deck boy. Bill lived about 3 minutes' walk from where *Cape York* berthed at Reid Street Pier, Williamstown. The life of Riley personified. After demobilisation and with the gun removed, Bill signed on as an AB, and came back to reality after 4 years of luxury living. But he was a philosophical and easy-going man and he adapted to the hard work again fairly easily.

Ernie Cooper was the Shipwright, or Carpenter as this position was often titled. I think it was a courtesy title for he never displayed any craftsman-like skills while I knew him. Ernie was a born pessimist, very skilled at making a 2-minute job spin out for 2 hours, and as thin as Eric Mussared the bo's'un was fat. Eric and Ernie shared a cabin amidships, an arrangement that plainly irked Eric. Eric was a person of some importance, and a nobody like Ernie really had [no] right to have midship quarters, let alone share Eric's cabin. A regular job for the duty deck boy was to replenish the bo's'un's food locker with condiments, jam, sauces etc. The bo's'un's palate was different from Ernie's, and we deck boys soon learned that we could get favours from Ernie by including on the bo's'un's order items that Ernie liked. Ernie liked relish, tomato sauce, Vegemite and similar spicy concoctions. Eric had a more subdued palate. Replenishment was not a straightforward matter of going to a cupboard and taking what was there. A written order had to be filled in and taken personally to the Chief Steward. I never knew his name, as everyone knew him as Chief. He was a little humourless man with large horn-rimmed glasses and was a born bureaucrat. If he was ever audited I would bet my starboard sea-boot the auditors would find his records to be precise, neat, complete and accurate for as long as he had been on the ship.

Cape York's skipper in 1945 was Captain Clare. The Mate was McKenzie. Bo's'un was Eric Mussared. Carpenter was Ernie Cooper. Deck boys other than myself



Cape Everard.

were Ray White, living today in Hobart, Bob Kieron and Don Nichols of Melbourne. Gunner was AB Bill Bridgeman from Williamstown. Bill was born in 1894, so by 1939 he was a bit old for active sea service, and became a DEMS (Merchant Ship Defence) gunner. He had the life of Riley, living in his own cabin on the poop deck alongside his gun (possibly left over from WW1). No duties other than to polish the brass on his gun. In those days, the Henry Jones jam factory at Macquarie Wharf, Sullivans Cove, Hobart, was operating full bore. As soon as we berthed at Macquarie Wharf, Bill was in his full round rig with three GC stripes on his left arm and his gunner's badge on his left arm, sailor's scarf and lanyard flowing in the breeze, rolling along the Wharf to the cat calls and screams of delight from the women workers in the jam factory. Bill loved every minute of it.

Captain Clare was a good seaman, but odd. His conversation contained the expression "eh" after every two or three sentences. "Mr MacKenzie, we will reach Gabo [Island] at 0700 eh? Have Bo's'un open the forrard hatch by then. Hands will turn-to at 0600 eh. You will go off in the first boat. Second [Mate] can supervise unloading. We have a passenger coming back with us so warn Chief to have a cabin prepared eh. Weather report says a Low coming up from the sou'west so we'll have to be on the alert. I would like to finish by 1700. That's all eh."

Another character was the Chief Engineer. In traditional form he was a Scotsman. A prerequisite it seems to qualify for an engineer is that one must be a Scot. To a 16-year-old, he must have been at least 90. Little, wizened, stooped, hands always in his pocket, pronounced Scot's accent, and wispy hair. Whenever on deck he usually had an audience, for he seemed to have a never-ending library of stories to tell.

From time to time we would hear a rumour that Jap subs had attacked or sunk ships in our area. I used to fantasise that I was a boy hero doing my bit to defeat the Japs by being at sea in a war zone. It was years later that I realised we were safer in *Cape York* than we would have been anywhere else, because the Japs relied on working lights to ensure good navigation as much as did our ships, and there was no way they would have sunk a ship which existed to keep the lights going. At worst, we might have been stopped, [had our radio destroyed] and then [been] pirated of food or fresh water, but nothing else. So much for the self-styled boy hero!

Without exception, the seamen were capable but ever on the lookout to "swing the lead" which is the nautical expression for wasting the boss's time or, in contemporary vernacular, bludging. With the (then) powerful Seaman's Union backing them, they could call the tune whenever they fancied it. As individual people I could relate to them, but I had no time for their politics. It was worse in the next ship I went to.

After *Cape York*, I did a couple of trips on the *Kini*, carrying copper ore from Strahan (actually Regatta Point) in Macquarie Harbour to Port Kembla. Cargo on the trip south was simply beer for Hamer's pub. The other ship on the route was the *Kowhai*, even smaller than the *Kini*. In those days, Strahan was a tiny hick backwater. Today it is full of fat tourists doing trips to Sarah Island, up the Gordon River and through Hells Gate at slack tide. How times have changed.



Cliffy Island.

Life aboard the *Cape York*

Early in 1945 at the age of just 16, to escape parental disagreements which led to divorce, I quit high school and went to sea as a deck boy in a little merchant ship. The 1406-ton *Cape York* had the role of providing service to the outlying and remote lighthouses in the area bounded to the west by Four Hummocks Island west of Port Lincoln in the Southern Ocean, to the east by Gabo Island near the eastern border of Victoria and NSW, and to the south by Maatsuyker Island 120 km to the SW of Hobart.

Life aboard *Cape York* was a mixture of hard work and long hours when the weather allowed us to launch the motor boats to take the provisions ashore, and days of relative idleness when the weather turned foul. In a large part of our area of operations, the notorious Bass Strait, it was common to lie at anchor in the lee of a headland for 3 or 4 days until the seas and winds abated. This is when I learned all those useful skills of rope splicing, knots and hitches, as well as doing those infinitely boring but necessary tasks of rust chipping and painting.

The crew comprised skipper, two mates, three engineer officers, wireless operator, bo's'un, carpenter, six stokers, eight able seamen, one gunner, two cooks, one officers' steward (known only as "Chief"), and at the bottom of the totem pole, three deck boys. Total complement 30.

The skipper, Captain Clare, had a peculiar habit of inserting "eh" at random places in his verbal communication. Here is a typical example: "Mr Mate, we will steam at 5 knots tonight to arrive at Goose Island at 0615. Eh. Tell Bo's'un to shake the crew Eh at 0545. Cook will have breakfast eh ready at 0600. Turn to eh at 0630 and launch numbers one and two eh motor boats and bring them port side eh of the forrard hatch."

The bo's'un, Eric Mussared, was to us deck boys a martinet whose word was absolute law. To us three lowly creatures, he was probably about 7 feet tall and 130 years old. He loved his food. Eric, to his chagrin, shared a cabin with Ernie Cooper, the carpenter. Whereas Eric was large and with a dominating presence, Ernie was small, skinny and seemed to slink rather than walk. He had a perpetual sniffling cold and a hand rolled cigarette stub hanging from his lower right lip. Eric hated sharing his domain with Ernie, particularly when they had their meals together, served up by the duty deck boy, in Eric's inner sanctum. Eric loved ketchup slathered all over the cook's culinary efforts, and frequently there was no ketchup left in their food locker, because Ernie, who couldn't stand the sight of this black gooey mess being shovelled into Eric's large mouth, would periodically throw the half empty bottle of ketchup through the porthole. On such occasions, Eric would storm along the afterdeck to the seamen's quarters, and shout at the inoffensive duty deck boy to get another bottle "right *now*". This then required considerable diplomacy on the part of the duty deck boy, because all victuals were under the control of the steward, "Chief".

Chief, who had never been guilty of cracking a smile, had accurate, neat records of all food movements in and out of his larder for at least the previous 12 years. Thus, to break an established pattern of legitimate food usage was almost mutiny. He would always capitulate and produce a bottle of ketchup, not because he felt any affinity for Eric, but because he felt sorry for the poor suffering meat in the sandwich, the duty deck boy.

On the poop deck aft was mounted a gun. This was a 25-pounder, possibly left over from the Battle of Trafalgar – or more likely WW1. This Weapon of Mass

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR AND NATIONAL SERVICE

No. N.5010

TRADESMAN'S CERTIFICATE

WHEREAS the Tradesmen's Rights Regulation Act 1946-1958 provides that a Local Committee shall have power to issue tradesmen's certificates

AND WHEREAS the Local (Electrical Trades) Committee in the State of New South Wales resolved on the Sixth day of March 19 62 that a tradesman's certificate in relation to the trade of Tradesman (Radio) be granted to

GEORGE W. STEVENS, 14 SHACKEL AVENUE, GUILDFORD. N.S.W.

NOW THEREFORE this tradesman's certificate in relation to the trade of Tradesman (Radio) is granted at the direction of that Committee to

GEORGE W. STEVENS, 14 SHACKEL AVENUE, GUILDFORD. N.S.W.

DATED this Seventh day of March 1962.

This certificate does not entitle the holder to be employed on electrical operations for the performance of which the holding of a licence or certificate is required by or under the law of the Commonwealth or of a State or Territory of the Commonwealth unless he holds such a licence or certificate.

Signature of person to whom this certificate is granted _____

R. H. Waldon
Secretary,
Local (Electrical Trades) Committee.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR AND NATIONAL SERVICE

TELEPHONE XXXX 20234 Ext. 2624
TELEGRAMS: COLABOUR, SYDNEY
PLEASE ADDRESS REPLY TO: REGIONAL DIRECTOR BOX 4139 G.P.O. SYDNEY
AND QUOTE No. 230/2/20371

PRUDENTIAL BUILDING
39 MARTIN PLACE
SYDNEY

7th March, 1962.

Dear Sir,

Classification: Tradesman (Radio)

I have pleasure in informing you that the Committee has granted your application for a certificate as a tradesman in the above classification.

Certificate No. N. 5010 is enclosed and you should sign it in the space provided. Every care should be taken of your certificate as the Committee will not issue duplicates.

Your documents are also enclosed.

Yours faithfully,

R. H. Waldon

(A.H. WALDON)
Secretary
Local (Electrical Trades) Committee

Encl: RAN- Trade Proficiency Cert.

Mr. George W. Stevens,
14 Shackel Avenue,
GUILDFORD....N.S.W.

Destruction was under the control of Able Seaman Bill Bridgeman. Now if ever anyone led a life of Riley, it was Bill. Forrard of Bill's gun on the poop deck was a well appointed cabin, for the exclusive use of the gunner – no one else. Whenever he felt so inclined, Bill would help out with the loading and unloading of gear to and from the lighthouses by manning one of the winches. On those days when it was fine, he would volunteer to be coxswain of one of the motor boats. But that was it. He never stood watch, wielded a chipping hammer or a paint brush. He ate his meals with the seamen in their mess, only because he liked company. In Navy parlance, Bill was a three-badge AB. This meant he had at least 13 years' good conduct service in the RAN as an Able Seaman. He had a gunnery specialisation which he gained in 1923. So during WW2 he was considered too old for active service in the RAN, but ideally suited to be a DEMS (Merchant Ship Defence) Gunner.

Bill was an eternal optimist, and loved life. Our southern port for replenishment was Hobart, where we berthed alongside Macquarie Wharf. In those days, the IXL Henry Jones factory, which was located adjacent to Macquarie Wharf, was in full production. Ninety-nine per cent of the workers were women. As soon as we berthed, Bill would be ready to step ashore, fully clothed in his Naval uniform – round rig cap, tight low-cut jacket showing the hairs on his manly chest, and flared bell bottom trousers. Bill would swagger down the gangway, and in classic Gilbert and Sullivan "HMS *Pinafore*" style, he would quite literally roll along Macquarie Wharf, heading for the nearest pub, all the while grinning as dozens of the IXL women would call and whistle to him from their windows.

We knew that Jap subs were active in our operation area, and the wonder of it to me was that although we would spend anything up to 3 weeks straight at sea, we were never attacked. From time to time, other ships doing a quick run of a day or so between Melbourne and Sydney or Brisbane, would be torpedoed. At the time I felt very brave, but a few years later came the realisation that I was safer aboard *Cape York* than I would have been anywhere else. The reason for this is that the Japs relied on correct lighthouse operation as much as Allied shipping did, and they would have known all about *Cape York* and its role. Thus to sink us would have meant a less than effective lighthouse service, and a hazard, even danger, to their own navigation needs. So much for the boy feeling he was a hero.

In the 21st century, with all of Australia's remaining lighthouses on automatic operation, and with helicopters available to satisfy equipment and maintenance requirements, ships such as *Cape York* are now simply ghostly relics of a past era. Such is progress.





HMAS *Hawkesbury*, *Murchison*, *Platypus* and *Captain Cook* in Watsons Bay, 1946.



A newly minted RAN sailor, 1946.



Right, above: "Aerial and mast of LF (44 kHz)", Canberra, 1946, from 600 feet (180 m) up.
Right, below: "2 × 20 kW, 200 kW and Control desk at TS [Training Ship]", Canberra, 1946.

1946 to 1953, Royal Australian Navy

After spending about 14 months on *Cape York*, and having been promoted from deck boy to ordinary seaman, I had the choice of staying for another 2 years to qualify as an able seaman, or to quit and look for a bigger fish pond. I took the latter course and signed on on a little ship called *Kini*. *Kini* was one of the Union Steamship Company's vessels specifically built to carry copper ore from Strahan on Tasmania's west coast to Port Kembla in NSW. These ships, the *Kini* and the *Kowhai*, had to be small in order to sail through Hell's Gates, the narrow entrance to Macquarie Harbour. As Macquarie Harbour is large, being constantly supplied with water from the Gordon and Franklin Rivers, and as Hell's Gates are quite narrow, the tidal race at the Gates is quite spectacular. Thus entry to and exit from Strahan had to be nicely timed for that brief period of slack water.

In the early days of Tasmanian colonisation, one of the worst prisons for English convicts was Sarah Island in Macquarie Harbour. It was the unfortunate convicts who gave the harbour entrance its nickname. Sarah Island was the scene of the novel *For the Term of His Natural Life*.

Copper ore was mined at Mount Lyell to the north of Strahan, and shipped to Strahan by a narrow-gauge railway. The trucks were designed such that a crane on the wharf alongside which was the *Kini* or the *Kowhai* could in one movement lift the container off the bogie wheels, swing the container over the ship's open hatches, and tip the ore into the ship's hold. Loading could be completed quite quickly, so our stay in Strahan were generally limited to a matter of 24 to 36 hours.

Years later, about 1996, I visited Strahan, and the wharf complex, which was actually at Regatta Point a mile or so from Strahan, was a derelict wreck. Gone was all the

HMAS *Watson*

In August 1947, as a newly trained, very inexperienced (socially as well as technically) RAN Radio Mechanic, my first job after 12 months' training in the various RAN technical schools was at HMAS *Watson* in the radio workshop. The officer in charge, and my Divisional Officer, was Mr Ernest (Ernie) Morrison. The title "Mr" was given to those commissioned officers who had been promoted from the ranks. These officers wore one thin gold stripe on their tunic cuffs, and were colloquially dubbed "Thin Stripers". Officers in non-executive occupations also had an accompanying coloured stripe. Examples were red for doctors, orange for dentists, purple for engineers, white for paymaster staff. In those days Radio Mechanics were part of their own branch, viz. the Radio Mechanics Branch. Later, Radio Mechanics were absorbed into the Electrical Branch, and the distinguishing colour became green. Although I was part of it at the time, I don't recall if the Radio Mechanic Branch had a distinguishing colour.

Ernie was my first experience of close working contact with a naval officer, and I secretly promised myself that I would become like him. He was energetic, knowledgeable, and he played by the rules. As well, and in my opinion, he looked like the classical story book hero – handsome, dashing and articulate.

A few years later I also became a thin striper, but I think that was as far as the resemblance went.

When I left *Watson* for other duties, our paths did not ever cross again, mainly because Ernie remained with General Service (ships), whereas I transferred to the RAN Fleet Air Arm and became a "Birdie". However, that brief period which I spent working under Ernie's direction influenced me positively for the remainder of my Naval career, and I am sure in later life also.



George between two fellow trainees from HMAS *Torrens* in Adelaide, 1946.



George during radar training, possibly in Adelaide, 1946.

P&O ship *Maloja*.



machinery, buildings, railway lines and trucks. The wharf was still there but very insecure looking. The route which the railway line took was being developed into a tourist attraction, but the river bank growth which had been well and truly killed by the pollutants from the mine was still far from regenerating. It may take 100 or more years for the river to return to its once clean and beautiful state. Some of the old buildings were still occupied, but much of the town had been treated to a yuppie facelift.

It was during my brief term in *Kini* that I witnessed the dirty underhand dealings of the militant Seaman's Union on more than one occasion, and I reasoned that if this was to be my future working environment if I stayed in the Merchant Marine, then I would be heading for trouble. So I signed off the ship with one misgiving which was that I was turning down employment which paid very well indeed. To illustrate, I went from £15 a week on *Kini* to £1/5s a week when I joined the RAN.

For a month or so I waffled around earning a living as a painter's assistant, until one evening I heard a radio announcement that the RAN wanted suitable recruits to train as radio and radar mechanics. School Leaving Certificate with studies in physics was preferred. I had neither, but that didn't stop me applying, and to my surprise I was offered a position. I looked at what I had, which was very little, the alternatives, which were non-existent, and decided I couldn't be worse off. So I accepted. Thus on 24 September 1946 at the age of 17 years and 7 months I became an Ordinary Seaman Second Class Radio Mechanic.

Forty-five years later I wrote and published a little book, which was a story of the Radio Mechanics of that time, and other than recounting here a few personal anecdotes, the general story of how I spent my initial years in the RAN can be gleaned from that book.

The recruit training of 6 weeks at HMAS *Cerberus* went quickly, and our class was soon in Adelaide. Even though it was only 2 years since I had left school, I found settling down to study again was difficult. Somehow I scraped through the examinations, and was drafted to HMAS *Watson* in Sydney for advanced training, followed by a short period at HMAS *Harman* in Canberra. So after almost 12 months, I was qualified to be let loose on HM Communication equipment, and was promptly appointed to the maintenance staff at HMAS *Watson*, very much to my chagrin. After all, I had joined the Navy to go to sea, and after 12 months all they could give me was what we called HMAS *Watson*, the "Fibro Frigate". Bad luck! You signed on for 12 years (from the age of 18 mind you), so make the most of it!

I played the rules, and in December 1947 qualified as a Leading Radio Mechanic. Luck came my way 9 months later when I was drafted to HMAS *Gladstone*. *Gladstone* was one of two training ships operating out of HMAS *Cerberus*. See my book for details.

At this time, volunteers were sought to train for the newly announced Royal Australian Fleet Air Arm. The wise old birds shook their heads and warned us youngsters: "Never volunteer for anything." That was the type of advice I regularly got on the occasions I ventured home: "Don't do this. Don't do that." So naturally I volunteered, and the outcome was great for many years afterwards.

From April 1949 through June 1950, I was attached to the Royal Navy Radar Training Establishment at a little village called Culcheth, near Warrington, Lancashire. Early in February 1949 I, along with 12 other Radio Mechanics (RMs) and about 500 civilian passengers, sailed from Port Melbourne on the P&O migrant ship *Maloja* for England.



Colombo Harbour, Ceylon (Sri Lanka).



A bumboat coming alongside in Colombo Harbour.



A coconut picker. “This cost me 1 rupee.”



A homeless man in the street of Colombo. “A great wariness 10 am”.

Our first foreign port was Colombo. Then Bombay, Aden, Suez, Port Said, Marseilles and Tilbury. By the time we reached England, between the 12 of us RMs we could muster about 10 shillings. Fortunately an RAN Paymaster officer came aboard with cash and instructions on where we were to go. It took us all day and no fewer than six train journeys to arrive at the little station of Culcheth, near Manchester in Lancashire. There were a number of HM Naval training establishments in the area, and HMS *Ariel* East Camp became our home for the next 13 months.

Our working time was spent learning the intricacies of Naval airborne and associated ground communications and radar equipment. When not playing some sort of sport, we would frequent the local pubs and I am sure terrorise the staid inhabitants. In those days, the exchange rate of Aussie pounds to English pounds was very much in favour of Australia. As well, we were given allowances for the "disruption" to our normal life, such that as Leading Hands we were being paid as much as an RN Lieutenant with 6 years' seniority. There must have been a lot of resentment at that, but we were oblivious to it.

At *Ariel* I qualified for promotion to Petty Officer just after my 20th birthday. This gave me privileges such as having my daily tot of rum uncontaminated with drinking water, and of being able to bottle the tot instead of drinking it down there and then under the watchful eye of the Regulating Petty Officer (Naval Policeman).

Now, consider this: here you have a bunch of undisciplined Australians, bragging about how good it is to be an Aussie, with three or four tots of rum in a little bottle in their pockets, more cash to spend than they have things to buy, and beer at about 1 shilling a pint. This was the recipe for many an hilarious night. The unfortunate thing

Post-War England

The rubble caused by the German bombing in the southern cities had mostly been cleared away, but there were still vast tracts of vacant land. The public transport system of intercity trains and interurban town and village bus services were well in place, and very effective. There were very few private cars on the road, but lots of motor bikes and cycles. Food was still scarce and some of it frightfully expensive. I recall being astonished on my first visit to London to see pineapples and grapes (a pound weight), imported from Spain, at prices equivalent to 3 or 4 days' working-man's wages. We Australians were regarded as rich because we received food parcels from home periodically. I recall one occasion of giving a small tin of ham to a family, and this was the first ham they had seen in 7 years.

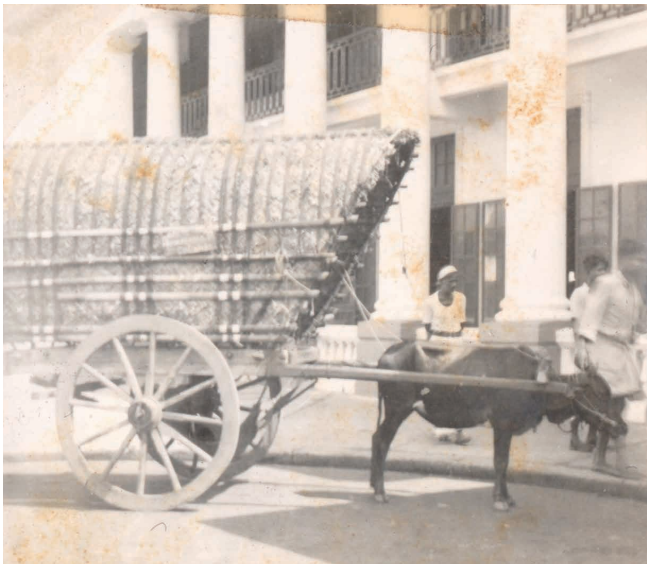
Milk was being delivered by horse and cart in bottles of 1 pint, ½ pint and ¼ pint. The currency in use was £1 note, 10 shillings note, florin (2 shillings), shilling, sixpence, threepence, penny, halfpenny and farthing. The price of beer varied, but typically 1 shilling a pint. Scrumpy (cider) was 4 pence for a half pint. Woodbine cigarettes were about 8 pence for a packet of 10. Players (better quality) about 10 pence.

Flour came to the grocer in large white cotton bags. These were coveted by frugal housewives, who unpicked the sewn seams, then cut and fashioned the material into underwear for their children and shirts for their husbands. Chocolate and steak were items rarely seen, and only then at high prices per courtesy of a flourishing black market.

A night out for mum and dad was to go to the local pub on a Saturday night, play darts or crib, drink maybe 2 half pints of bitter (mum) and 3 pints of mild (dad), in between having lots of singsongs with other locals accompanied by someone banging away at the ancient piano. On the way home from the pub, a stop at a roadside fish shop to buy some hot chips and a small bundle of winkles was essential. Moving pictures at



A snake charmer, Colombo.



An ox-drawn wagon, Colombo.



HMS *Ariel*, Culcheth, Lancashire.



Culcheth Church.

the local cinema were popular, regardless of what was showing.

Many people in the northern towns – Wigan, Leigh, Warrington and even Manchester – wore wooden clogs on their feet because they could not afford leather shoes.

The overall feeling was relief that there would be no more buzz bombs or doodlebugs, no more air raid sirens, and that henceforth, things would certainly improve.

was that we had to be sufficiently alert to pass the weekly examinations in order to be allowed to stay at *Ariel*.

The Women's Royal Naval Service – the WRENS – were well represented at *Ariel*, mostly as trainee RMs, and the inevitable happened with Australian RMs returning home with English WRENS brides alongside.

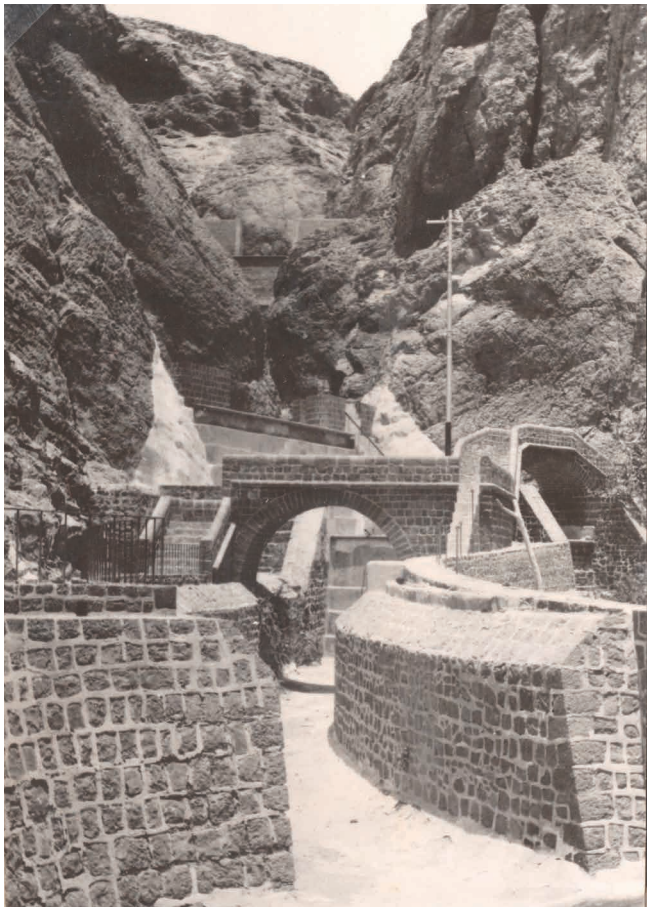
Eventually this utopian existence came to an end, and in June 1950 we sailed in another P&O migrant ship, *Ranchi*, from Tilbury via Port Said, Suez, Aden and direct to Fremantle, arriving in Sydney August 1950.

This was the commencement of a series of movements in and out of HMAS *Albatross* for the next 10 years. Again it was to be my lot that others went to sea and I remained kicking my heels at the base station. Then I got a break – of sorts. The training establishment HMAS *Cerberus* needed qualified personnel to teach new recruits the mysteries of Naval aviation equipment, so I returned to *Cerberus*, this time in a slightly more exalted position than previously as a raw recruit.

Once again, Fate took a hand. Volunteers were sought to form a Naval component of Australia's Queen Elizabeth coronation contingent. Remembering the happy outcome of the previous volunteering, I again volunteered – and was accepted. This time I was off to England again, in a ship, HMAS *Sydney*, which had just done a tour in Korea. It was really the life of Riley. For 2 hours each morning and afternoon we would be drilled on the flight deck, and the rest of the time we were tourists. After departing Fremantle, we stopped briefly at Aden, Suez and Port Said. Our next stop was Tobruk, where there was a ceremony at the Australian War Cemetery. Our next stop for 3 days was Malta. Here in the town square (straight out of a Hollywood movie) with tables, chairs, music, colourfully dressed happy people, I first tasted dry red wine. It was Chianti, and ever since I have loved the taste of a dry red.

In Malta we took part in another Naval ceremony, and on this occasion I lost out because I was nominated as the left hand-marker (Petty Officer rank) of an armed guard of honour for Lord Louis Mountbatten. As was his custom, he spoke briefly and on a one-to-one basis with some of the troops, including me. Can't remember what he said but he was pleasant. Some years later I was again co-opted for left-hand marker in a guard of honour at *Albatross* when Lord Louis and Lady Edwina visited. He stopped when he got opposite to me, looked at my medals, one of which was the QE II Coronation gong, and said "I see you have Her Majesty's Coronation Medal. Have we met before somewhere?" Either a remarkable memory or a remarkably good guess – probably the latter.

From Malta we sailed [west] for a brief stop at Gibraltar and then on to Portsmouth. We stayed on board for a few days, then on June 1 we were bused to Earl's Court in London, where we were bedded down for the night. June 2 dawned grey and drizzly, and didn't improve much throughout the day as we marched across London, carrying rifles "at the slope", and progressively getting damper. The Australian contingent was midway



Above: Tawella Tanks, Crater Ciry, Aden. Below: Crescent Steamer Point, Aden.





Above: Camel train, Aden.
Below: Anzac Memorial, Suez Canal.

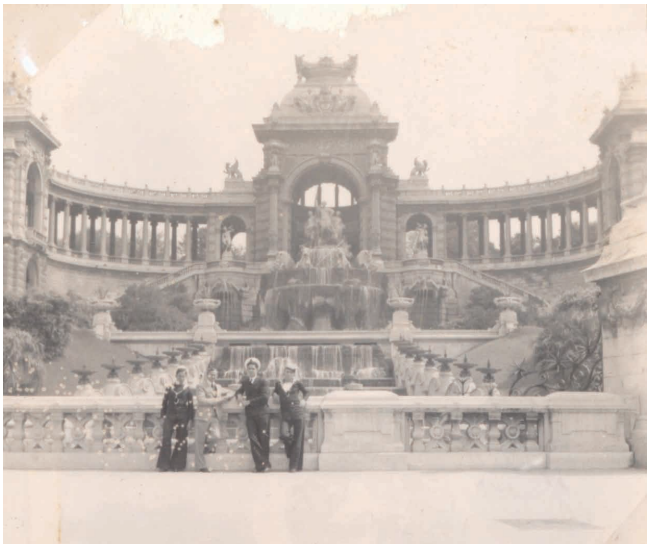




Arab dhow, Suez Canal.



Unit of pilot's crew, Suez.



At entrance to botanic gardens, Marseille.









Marseille.



The Big Ben clock tower, Palace of Westminster, London.



Royal Horse Guards and Queen Victoria Statue, Buckingham Palace, London.



King Charles Tower, Chester.

Packhorse Inn, Culcheth.





"Jim, Bob, Isla" and George at Portsoy Hogmanay dance.



At Edinburgh Castle.



Self-portrait in digs, HMS *Ariel*, Culcheth.



George with Andrew McKay, a fellow trainee, near Andrew's home in Scotland.

between two bands, which of course were out of sync with each other, and the volume of whose music waxed and waned with the wind, the echoes and the effect of rounding corners marked by buildings. The outcome was that we presented a poor show of constantly being out of step with each other.

The next day was better. The Australian contingent had a band all to itself, a Ghurka pipe band, and we marched in step in a very smart manner all the way from Earl's Court to the grounds of Buckingham Palace. This function had been reserved for the Commonwealth contingents. The Queen came out, and after the usual ceremonies, presented her Coronation Medal to the contingent leaders. And as she was doing this, equerries, with wonderful pomp, marched slowly along each row, presenting the medal to all the troops. The Queen then spoke briefly, and we returned to Earl's Court for a night of what was going to be revelry. However, something like 10 million others in London had decided to do the same thing, so after a couple of hours of fighting a mass of seething humanity, and with absolutely no show of getting even a lemonade, let alone a warm English beer, we gave up and had an early night on our mattresses on an Earl's Court hard floor.

Next day saw us in buses again, this time for a staging at a Guards camp at Pirbright. An interesting insight into English army life was in store for us. The showers had no hot water. In fact, the shower recesses looked like they had never been used. Fortunately, June in England can be warm, so a quick cold shower was not too arduous. The next morning there was still no hot water, so we got an extra mug of tea each, and used this as our shaving water.

One night in Pirbright was enough, and the next day it was back to "Pompey" and aboard *Sydney* in time for the Fleet Review. *Sydney*, with possibly 300 or 400 other ships of all nations, moved out and anchored in the Solent in prescribed positions for the Queen to inspect as she sailed past on the Royal barge. It is possible that there has not been a bigger assembly of naval vessels since that day in June 1953.

We left Portsmouth and headed west for Halifax, Nova Scotia. En route we experienced a North Atlantic gale. How small ships like frigates and destroyers coped with weather conditions like that during the War particularly is nothing short of astonishing. My lasting impressions of Halifax are the coloured doorways, and the housewives vigorously scrubbing the steps leading to the front doors. Patently very house proud.

From Halifax it was to Baltimore, the commercial port of Washington. We were invited to a garden party at the Australian Ambassador's residence in Washington. At that time the ambassador was Percy Spender. We travelled by bus and were escorted by state police on motor cycles. They seemed to relish the opportunity to sound their sirens at the slightest provocation, and loudly berate all hapless citizens and motorists who were not zealous in making way for us. We also visited the Arlington War Cemetery, which was beautifully laid out and immaculately maintained.

Our next stop was Kingston, Jamaica, with its shabby buildings and smiling people. From here to a place called Coca Sola at the eastern entrance to the Panama Canal. Coca Sola was a US army base, and they made us very welcome. The journey through the canal was totally different from that of the Suez Canal. Land around the Suez for miles is flat, and mainly sandy desert. Land around the Panama Canal is often very hilly, and with lush vegetation



In Edinburgh.



In Honolulu, 1953.



Climbing Ben Nevis, Scotland.

not far away. The Suez transit is non-stop, whereas to traverse the Panama Canal, ships have to be raised and lowered on two occasions via water locks.

Hawaii was our next stop. It was paradise. For $1.00 we could buy a hamburger and three cans of beer at the Army PX, and either sit on the verandah or move a few more yards down on to the sand from which of course we could go swimming.

Auckland was our last stop before home. My memory of Auckland at that time is that we formed up in ranks in the main street near the docks, then with a military band marched up the hill to the Town Hall, where the mayor had put on a party for us.

Apparently the powers that be decided that as I was already aboard *Sydney*, it would be simpler all round to keep me there rather than send me back to *Cerberus*. So HMAS *Sydney* became my Naval home for the next 18 months.



1953 to 1961, RAN and marriage

Korean War memories

I first became involved in the Korean War just as the cease fire was being negotiated in 1953, and remained in the area of Japan and Korea for the next 8 months. During this period, the only difference which I could sense between an active war and the very uneasy truce was that no weapons were being discharged. Everything else was on a war footing, such as tens of thousands of troops at the ready, war ships patrolling, combat aircraft flying reconnaissance missions, combined training manoeuvres, troop movements, patrols, and all the logistical activities to support these.

The United Nations force comprised units from a number of nations, each of which had its own geographical area of base operations. From the base, all the strategic planning, the co-ordination with the forces of other nations, the maintenance and supply depots etc. were concentrated. For the Royal Australian Navy, the base was at a town named Kure, to the south and west of the main Japanese island of Honshu. Kure is a port on what the Japanese call their Inland Sea. The Inland Sea is an almost land-locked expanse of sea water bounded by some of the coast line of the islands of Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu. Pictorially, the Inland Sea is quite beautiful with its relatively calm waters and steep forested hills.

The Australian Navy's assigned wharf at Kure was long, well constructed and had deep water around it. HMAS *Sydney*, a light fleet aircraft carrier of perhaps 18,000 tons, and not a small vessel by any means, could comfortably berth at this wharf. Typical of most such constructions, the wharf jutted out into the sea, and



HMAS *Sydney* II.

from the land looked an easy target for a ship's captain bringing his ship alongside. However, when viewed from the sea, it looked quite imposing, as at the land end was a huge grey stone wall, on which in 10-foot-high white letters was the warning "**Accidents don't happen. They are caused.**"

Sydney's skipper was Captain George Oldham, a really fine ship handler. On every occasion of docking at Kure, George Oldham would con his ship to approach the wharf at a fine angle, doing about 5 or 6 knots (approximately 9 to 11 kilometres an hour). In the open sea, that is crawling along, but with a huge stone wall looming up ahead, that is an almost reckless speed. But on every occasion George Oldham would judge matters to perfection, and in a matter of minutes the great lump of a ship would come gently to rest against the fenders, for the mooring lines to go out.

The routine for *Sydney* was fairly regular. We would spend about a week in Kure replenishing stores and fuel. We would then sail west across the Inland Sea, through the Straits of Shimonoseki between Honshu and Kyushu, across the Korean Strait and into the Yellow Sea bounded by China to the west and the Korean peninsula to the east. Once in the Yellow Sea, it was then a matter of steaming slowly north, then south and back again in the Yellow Sea, for perhaps 2 to 3 weeks. Each day we would launch aircraft, the Firefly V and later VI, and the Sea Furys. Their task was simply to observe what was happening in the South Korean zone in the way of any military activities, and to report back.

Sydney was an old carrier with a straight deck, that is she did not have an angle deck as do all modern carriers. Launching was a matter of the ship's aircraft handler crews aligning the aircraft on the steam catapult for an accelerated launch – in concept little different from today's technology. Recovering aircraft, however, was a different matter. Stretched in transverse fashion across the after (rear) end of the flight deck, spaced at intervals of perhaps 4 metres, were arrestor wires. At the rear of each aircraft was a long hook which the pilot would lower hydraulically as he approached the ship to make a landing. The technique was for the pilot to drop his aircraft on the after-end of the flight deck at about number 3 arrestor wire. Should he succeed in so doing, the aircraft would be brought to a controlled stop by the arrestor wire holding the aircraft hook.

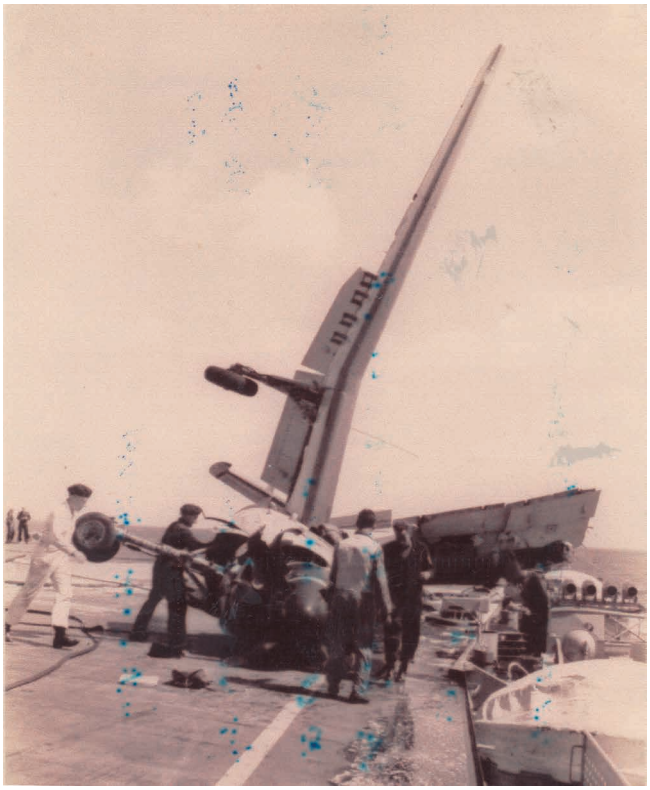
To assist the pilot to hit the flight deck at a suitable point was the Batman. The Batman was an experienced pilot who positioned himself in a special little pontoon (the sort of place where AA guns would be possible) on the port side almost at the end of the flight deck, and perhaps 5 feet below the flight deck level. In each hand the Batman would have a bat not unlike a table tennis bat but larger.

The routine for landing was for the aircraft, one at a time, to fly along the port side of the ship but in the opposite direction, then having passed the ship the pilot would do a left bank, turning the aircraft's nose 180° and line his aircraft up with the centre line of the flight deck. The pilot would then focus his attention on the Batman. Using his [pair of?] bats, the Batman would give signals to the pilot. Such might be "Too high – come down," "Left wing too low" and so on. Then at the crucial moment the Batman would cross his bats, this being the signal for the pilot to throttle back on his engine speed. With this, the aircraft would drop like a stone and, hopefully, hit the deck near number 3 arrestor wire. If the Batman judged that a



On the deck of the HMAS *Melbourne* during a SEATO course in the South China Sea in 1960. George is in white coveralls.





Above: Following the occasional crash-landing, equipment was salvaged from the aircraft, which was then dumped overboard.

Left: The "Jumbo" crane and rail used to manoeuvre aircraft on deck.

safe landing would not be achieved, he would frantically "wave off" with his bats, the pilot would gun the engine and move his control column to the left. If all went well, the aircraft would shear off to the ship's port side and position itself for another approach.

In later years the Batman was replaced by a reflective mirror system that enabled the pilot to see in reflection his aircraft's attitude in relation to the flight deck and arrestor wires.

Once at a standstill, two handlers would run out, release the hook, and at the same time the three barrier wires would be lowered allowing the aircraft to taxi forward to the parking area. Here the crew would alight, and the maintenance crews would take over. Once flying for the day had been completed, some of the aircraft would be taken below on the lifts for maintenance work to be carried out below decks. Other serviceable aircraft would be ranged aft ready for the next day's flying.

Further forward of the arrestor wires on the flight deck, also arranged transversely across the deck but at a height of maybe 4 metres, were three strong barrier wire assemblies. Should the aircraft's hook fail to engage one of the seven arrestor wires, the aircraft would hurtle forward, maybe at about 80 knots and be stopped by a barrier wire.

When the weather was fine, "barriers", as they were colloquially called, seldom occurred. However, with the ship rolling and pitching in bad weather, it was inevitable that in a day's flying there would be at least one barrier. Some of the damage so sustained to an aircraft could be repaired on board. More often the damaged aircraft was stowed in the hangar for offloading in Kure. Occasionally on a 3-week tour in the Yellow Sea, such damage would be assessed as serious, and the wrecked aircraft would simply be lifted by "Jumbo", the mobile crane, and dropped into the sea.

On one occasion we had a spectacular prang, when the approaching aircraft hit the round down (the very end of the flight deck), bounced over the arrestor wires, and the barriers, and finished up crashing into the aircraft parked forward.

That winter of 1953 is the coldest I can ever remember. Comparatively speaking, we Navy had it easy. The most time we would spend in the freezing conditions on the flight deck would be 2 hours preparing for a launch, and another 2 hours during a recovery. The rest of the time we would be snugly below decks in our workshops or messes. Not so the poor Army ashore. As always in time of war, the Army gets it worst.

We were issued with underwear which went from our necks to our ankles, just like the old photos of granddad in his passion killers. When I first saw these, there was absolutely no way I was going to put them on. Once we hit the cold, even the heart throb Betty Grable could not have got them off my body.

On one occasion we anchored off Inchon, the port of Seoul, and were invited ashore to join the audience of a touring entertainment party in a big tent. My eyes simply boggled at one act which was a troupe of Maori singers and dancers, in traditional costume, bare arms and legs, in an air temperature which was only just above freezing.

My wife to be at that time, Shirley, had a friend from the teenage surfing days, Peter Blackford. Peter had joined the Army and had been wounded. As he was in hospital in Kure, it was easy for me to visit him. I have



George with Alan Earle in front of the Memorial Cenotaph in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, completed only 1 year before.

seen illustrations of Florence Nightingale in a ward of soldiers wounded in the Crimea, and I was reminded of this when I went to visit Peter. His ward had seriously injured in it. The ward was poorly lit. It looked drab – nothing to brighten up the surrounds. There was none of the banter typical of a ward of servicemen with lesser complaints. Peter was in no shape to make conversation, and I left as soon as I decently could.

What had happened to Peter was like this. Just prior to my visit to him, Peter and his unit were in a front-line position, which was to be supported by Canadian artillery from behind the lines. Due to poor communication, the training and laying information to set the artillery for firing on the North Korean positions ahead of the front line was incorrect, and instead Peter's unit was shelled. Some of his unit were killed and some, like Peter, were wounded. Today this is called "friendly fire". Some friend! When I visited Peter, the surgeons were trying to save his leg, which had been shattered above the knee. Shortly after my visit, the surgeons amputated his leg.

In those days, Japan was still struggling economically. The relatively well paid servicemen had a wonderful time during their leave periods buying souvenirs, food and drinks at bargain prices. The shop keepers were keen to do business, and valiantly tried to converse with us in fractured English. Not to be outdone, we soon picked up quite a number of Japanese phrases. "How much you speak" was a standard phrase used during the price haggling process. "Me cherry girl" (meaning "I am a virgin"), was one uttered by prostitutes advertising their charms. If something was considered to be the very best, then it was "Ichi ban", or "Number one". On the other hand, something that was the absolute pits was "Ju ban" or "Number ten".

The Occupation of Japan by Allied forces was still very much in force, and one of the many restrictions imposed on us "tourists" was that we must not venture outside the city limits, which were really quite small. So after a couple of "runs" into Kure township for a beer or two and to buy some souvenirs, the novelty soon wore off. On one such evening, I decided to return to the ship quite early, leaving my mates to their various devices in town. Now the transport available to us was rather enterprising. If you imagine a motor bike with its rear wheel removed, and replaced by a wide axle carrying two wheels, you have a motor tricycle. On top of this three-wheeled chassis was erected an almost circular cabin, with a bench seat running around it from the driver in the front, [all the way] back to the driver. This bench seat was capable of seating five passengers. So the total maximum load was six humans, often five of whom had large parcels of treasures bought at bargain prices in Kure's many little shops.

I forget the fare, but let's assume it was 200 yen for a one-way trip from the wharf into town. Four of us would therefore contribute 50 yen each, and away we would go, bouncing along the unsealed pot-holed roads at what must have been about 15 km per hour. I am sure the bikes' engines had one cylinder only judging by the noise they made.

On this particular night of retiring early back to the ship, I travelled alone, and being in a somewhat perverse mood, offered the driver 100 yen when we arrived back at the sentry gate at the end of the wharf. Naturally the driver argued, and we both became rather heated. Suddenly I realised my precarious position. The driver was perhaps in his thirties, and fairly likely a few years prior had been at the business end of a rifle or bayonet killing his enemies. I had visions of him



George and Shirley on the beach, probably at Narrabeen, 1952.



Left: Fury squadron, RANAS, Nowra.



George with Alan Earle in Hong Kong, 1953.

drawing a knife and swiftly parting my ribs with it. So in cowardly fashion, I called to the sentry and said "I reckon the correct taxi price is one hundred yen, but the driver here says it is two hundred. What do you think?" Of course the sentry said in a loud voice "One hundred yen." There was a pause of what seemed to me like 5 minutes, but was more like 5 seconds. Racing through my mind was the advice I had received over the years: "Watch his eyes, they will tell you when he makes his move. No, watch his feet, they will tell you which direction he will move. No, watch his hands, they are ones that will do the damage."

Then the tension was broken. With all the vehemence he could muster he shouted "Number ten!," got on his bike and rode off.

We had cause one night to question the effectiveness of the liaison and communication between the British and American HQs. *Sydney* left Kure late one evening [for] Shimonoseki. It was black night as we approached, and we were relying heavily on short-range radar to navigate us through the narrow Straits. All of a sudden the radar echo of a ship was seen rapidly approaching us on the precise reciprocal of our course. "Collision Stations" alarms sounded and we quickly closed all "X" and "Y" water-tight doors as the Officer of the Watch altered course to avoid the approaching vessel. As the vessel skimmed past us a stone's throw away under the glare of one of our searchlights it could be seen it was an American Landing Ship Tank. We then relaxed, turned back on our assigned course, only to rush to Collision Stations a second time. The same story was repeated, and we missed running down the much smaller vessel. Then there was a third occurrence, and once again we missed the other vessel.

It subsequently transpired that HQ instructions to us and those to the Yanks were stupidly mixed up, and worse still not double checked, with all ships destined to come to grief but for the effectiveness of the radar and the alertness of those on *Sydney*'s bridge.

Meeting Shirley

George met Shirley in either of two ways. According to her brother Robert Crawford Martyn (Bob), they met at Narrabeen campground. The Martyn family used to spend summer camping at Narrabeen, sleeping in the big family tent, cooking over a camp stove and showering from a kerosene tin of water heated over a fire. Shirley commuted to work by bus and ferry. Fred Stevens and his second wife, Nance (née Nancy Alumward Sim), had moved to Sydney for Fred to take up a senior role with the Department of Civil Aviation, and had bought a house at 83 Bangor Street, Guildford, one street away from Shirley's home at 83 Berwick Street. They decided to camp at Narrabeen, where Glan and Anne met Fred and Nance by chance. George had come to visit Fred and Nance, and he met Shirley. He quickly endeared himself to the Martyn family by spending time with Bob, then a little boy, teaching him to swim. The fact that the two families lived only 100 m apart was a bonus.

According to Shirley's memoirs, however, they met in Guildford:

"Our meeting was [what] you would call out of the ordinary. Coming home from the train, the temperature was cool, getting dark, and as I turned the corner I saw my Dad's car parked askew in the gutter instead of it being in the garage. A tragedy had occurred; the car should have been in the garage.





At Married Quarters, Nowra, 1953.

"I went into the house to see Mum crying and Dad in shock – a lad aged 16 ran into the car on his motorbike. As Dad was turning the corner, the bike went under the car, and the lad was thrown onto the footpath. The police came; so did the neighbours. The boy died. Dad had to go to court, but he was not charged.

"George happened to be at his father's (Fred's) home [in the next street]. He quickly went to the scene. So did the local policeman, who stood up for Dad. No charges were made."

Later, Fred sent George to the Martyn home to see how Glan was feeling, and that's when George and Shirley got to know each other. Perhaps both stories are true.

Shirley and George married only a year later, but they married twice: first on 16 October 1953 in a civil ceremony at the Registrar's Office so they qualified for Married Quarters at Nowra before George went back to sea; second on 26 June 1954 at church for all the family and friends to attend. They honeymooned on Lord Howe Island when the only way to get there was to catch the flying boat from Rose Bay, on Sydney Harbour, and there was only one vehicle (a ute) on the island.



Signing the register at the second (church) wedding, 26 June 1953, at Saint Mark's Church of England, Granville. The sticking plaster on George's finger relates to an incident only the day before, when he was chopping out lantana. The lantana pierced his finger, which rapidly became infected.

Letter to Shirley, Christmas 1953

Saturday 26th Dec 1953, Kure

A very happy New Year to you. Just now I felt as though I could write a book, and thought, well, why not? So I took a book and started to write, and this is it.

Well, to go back to my last short note to you, we came alongside as anticipated at 0900 and spent the remainder of the morning having a good clean up around the place in preparation for the next two days. Leave was granted from 1300 and all who could were ashore in a rush, all, that is, except the duty watch and a few cautious people like Skelly and myself. I washed and ironed a few things then slept for about two hours and was I thankful for it later on!

At 5 pm we went ashore into Kure and I got three crockery samples as promised. There is an eggshell cup, a Satsuma saucer, chipped a little, and a Noritake saucer. As they were "presento", I made a "presento" of 40 cigarettes and the shop keeper and I parted company the best of friends. I have packed the three pieces in a box and will post them and the tablecloth I mentioned before FAO ["for the attention of"]. I say FAO because the poor old postie has been run to a standstill these last few weeks and I don't want to unnecessarily burden him.

Inside the lid of the box you will find a small sheet of white paper giving all the pertinent info, price ranges, design, quantities, so be careful when you unpack it not to lose it amongst the packing. I think you will find the price of crockery is better than that of the material samples I sent you. Incidentally, Betty Williams does know our secret so you can sign whichever way you please.

Also inside the box is a little box with an example of damascene work. As you will see, the design is beautifully worked but the "gold" holder is shoddy and spoils an otherwise lovely trinket.

Compacts and cigarette cases of this work are lovely for they are black with the gold and silver wire inlay only and have none of the imitation stuff around them as the brooch I am sending to you has. In the middle of this letter you will find a slip of paper explaining exactly how damascene work is done. Quite an elaborate process, isn't it?

After I had taken the crockery I thought I had better buy something there as he appeared to have gone to some trouble to get the three different pieces, so I bought something for you. I intended to keep it as a surprise for you but I can't keep secrets. It is a musical jewellery box. You know the sort of thing: open the lid and it plays a tune. It has a mirror inside the lid, plush lining, a tray that is hinged and comes up as the lid opens and has three little compartments in it, and a special little compartment in the bottom for rings. It is dark red, almost brown with Oriental design and finished in lacquer. Quite charming I thought. I don't like sending it to you in the post as it might be damaged so I'll keep it and bring it home.

Next we had a meal at Kure House and then to the Fleet Canteen for a few quiet drinks. Here we met some British Army types who wanted 12 volunteers to come to the mess at Hiro, about 8 miles away, and help them get rid of a beer surplus, as they put it. We didn't like to refuse as they were quite pleasant about it, so we piled in a line of jeeps and twenty minutes later arrived at their mess.

In the centre of the room against one wall was a huge fireplace with a fire burning, there were Chinese lanterns, coloured lights, all the Xmas trimmings, and it seemed like a real English Christmas. Unfortunately it didn't snow.

To let things loosen up gradually a darts competition was started and for some unknown reason I was throwing well that night and came close to winning.

Next they put on their star turn, a piper in full kilts, and two dancers, kilts also, did a couple of acts dancing around the crossed claymores. The three of them were mess members but in their regalia they looked like professional entertainers.

Just as they finished, along came the carol singers outside, so we all trooped out and joined in.

After they left, the singing mood persisted and we gathered around the piano and sang. But not carols. I still think the Navy knows naughtier songs than the Army. And more.

Next came a comedy turn and I happened to be the scapegoat. It happened like this.

I had just got myself a beer when the three army birds came up arguing, and one suddenly swung on me and said:

"What do you think?"

"Think what?" I countered.

"Well, we have a WO 2 in the mess here who says he can guess the weight of any man to within one pound."

"That so?"

"Yes, and I think he can't do it. What do you think?"

"Well, I think it probably could be done but it's doubtful if he could get mine as I am deceptive when dressed." (I walked right into the trap there and then.)

"OK, we'll ask him to try. I've seen him do it time and again and I'll bet ¥1000 he can do it," said another.

Another type said, "Rot!" And in two ups [?] the mess was in an uproar and big bets were being laid. A table was cleared and money and betting slips were placed and I was beginning to realise that they meant it.

So along came the WO [Warrant Officer] and we had a few words and he agreed that it was going to be difficult. However, would I write my weight on a piece of paper and put it on the table so no one could see it? I would and did. And would I sit on this stool right in the middle of the floor? I did.

He walked around me sizing me up, felt my ankles and legs, arms and chest, and then said, "Now, put your arms around my neck," and when it I had done so he lifted me, hefted me a few times and put me back on the stool again. Then he considered me a little while longer and said, "Right. I've got you just about taped." And, "Now when I lift you this time I want you to give a heave, sort of lift yourself as well. If you do that then that is half a pound my way and I'll win. If you don't, then that is half a pound against me and I'll lose."

So I put my arms around his neck again and the room was as quiet as a church. All of a sudden he said, "Now," lifted me, I heaved and he sat me back on the stool again and the room rocked with laughter. For a second I was puzzled until I realised that I had a very very wet sit upon. When he said "Now" and lifted, someone from behind slipped a beer tray full of icy water onto the stool. I think I laughed as much as the rest of them then, but spent a lot of the remainder of the night standing stern first to the fire. Talk about a wet arse and no fish.

Supper came on and it was beautiful cold roast pork and chicken, ham and dozens of different varieties of savouries. I ate enough for two I'm sure, for next morning I wasn't the least interested in breakfast.

Come midnight and the piper picked up his pipes and we formed a long line behind him and walked around the mess then out into the sleeping quarters. On the way I acquired an empty beer bottle and a fire bucket, so as drummer I was elected to second position behind the piper. Cabin after cabin we entered, switched on the lights, pulled the occupants, if any, out of bed and stripped the bed and proceeded to the next cabin.

Back in the mess again and the CO, a Lt Colonel, announced he was leaving, made a short speech and stood back while the president responded. He said the usual nice things and finished up with: "And so, sir, on behalf of the mess and our Navy guests, I would like to say this, 'How about another hour's extension of time for the bar?'" And the old bloke just laughed and said, "Go ahead, you'd have it anyway."

The party broke up, we filed into a 10 ton truck and the driver took us right on to the wharf. He wished he had his jeep as he could have taken us right on board and done the thing properly. He was quite peeved because no one had told him the gangway was too small for a 10 tonner.

One of our hosts insisted on accompanying us and brought with him a huge box of leftovers from supper which he was going to give to the duty watch. He made the top of the gateway and collapsed over a piece of rope, but he went down gallantly like a true soldier and didn't spill a piece of the supper. The officer of the watch thanked him and escorted him back to the truck and that was the last we saw of him.

All in all, a very successful Xmas Eve. But the next one will be better as I will be with you. Only another 364 days.

Xmas Day saw the ship in a state of chaos after 10 am. At 9 am we had a church service in the hangars, after which Santa gave us our parcels. These parcels came with the compliments of the *Sun* Melbourne and contained 2 ounces of tobacco, papers, toothbrush and paste, razor blades, writing pad and envelopes, butterscotch and a plum pudding. Nice thought, wasn't it? Then there was a beer issue and the captain and all officers toured the ship wishing all the compliments of the season. In one mess the boys told the commander that he had dirtied the deck with his boots and would he scrub out or take punishment. He preferred the former, took off his coat, hat, collar and tie, shoes, socks, rolled his pants up while they got his bucket and hot water and brush, and he set to and scrubbed the mess. However, he said that as he had three rings on his arm, could he detail off someone to help him. They acquiesced and he made the navigator scrub the tables with a toothbrush.

Commander (S) had to scrub out the galley. While he was doing that the chief cook said he wasn't eating any Xmas dinner as he knew what was in it and brought his own with him, a live rooster complete with leather collar and string lead. The gunnery officer did his turn as wharf sentry, dressed in a bright array of clothes topped off with a bandsman's helmet while all along the ship's side sailors shouted orders at him.

The pipes that were made over the ships amplifier system were beauts. Some I couldn't repeat. A few were:

"Chaplain Weir and Father Ellis report to the implement store for a gratuitous issue of harps, hymn books and haloes size 13."

"The ship is expected to berth in Sydney 0900 16th July 1954."

"Correction to the last pipe, the ship will not berth in Sydney 0900 16th July 1954. The ship will berth in Sydney 0905 16th July 1954."

805 Qquadron radio boys collected a heap of worn out shoes, took them to 805's CO's cabin, marched in, dumped them on the middle of the deck with a piece of prose and walked out without saying a word. The substance of the prose was that it was expected that the boots and shoes would be polished and returned to the radio blokes within the hour by all 805's pilots and that it was hoped they would polish the shoes in a better manner than the way they flew.

In a few minutes a pipe was made: "All 805 pilots muster at the CO's cabin with polishing gear at the double," and before the hour was up, the CO and his pilots duly reported to the radio chaps with polished boots and stood in a group reciting a return piece of prose to the effect that it was hoped that the shoes and boots were polished to satisfaction, and that the standard of flying in the future would be improved. Then they, without further words, walked out also. This sort of rot went on all over the ship. Two lads borrowed officers' uniforms and went across the wharf to a RN frigate, *Concord*, went into the ward room, had a drink, invited some of the officers aboard *Sydney* for a drink after lunch and left without anyone in *Concord* waking up.

Christmas dinner was roast turkey and all the trimmings and the cooks really excelled themselves. It was a beautiful meal.

After lunch I was all prepared to have another little snooze when Alwyn, Skelly, Ken, Chloe and Ron asked me to come ashore. I told them no and they told me yes so I went ashore to the Field Canteen. But it didn't do them any good for I had about an hour's sleep in a big armchair. I was glad I did for I met two chaps who I had not seen in six years and we talked like a pack of hens, reminiscing.

We went to Kure House for tea and the meal squashed all enthusiasm for a good night. By 9 pm I was in bed and fast asleep. Asleep until one of the lads came in strumming a guitar he had bought. He came close to wearing it.

Well, that brings us up to today. Boxing Day.

It is now 1300 and I will spend the next four hours writing to you and doing a bit of ironing. A woman's work is never done.

This evening I am going off again to buy you a doll and some badges for a new uniform which I shall buy soon.

The doll I am buying for you is Japanese and is a dressing table type. I think they are cute.

Do you know what I think? I think you are leading too hectic a life at the moment. Why? Because I have had three letters from you with 17 written on the back. I'm afraid you'll just simply have to do better.

At Inchon as I have mentioned previously I received letters 18 and 21. Here I received letters 22, 23, 24 and 25 but no 19 or 20. I'm wondering what could have happened to them.

On the way to Hong Kong in the next few days I'll compose a letter to the minister. It will be interesting to note if he changes his manner towards you in any way.

Also at Inchon I received a note from my mother saying that she was going to Sydney for a few days and that she would drop in on you at the Merc[antile Mutual]. By then of course it was too late to warn you to be prepared to meet her so I just had to hope for the best.

Yes, she does gush a bit, but don't be deluded, for under that exterior she's as hard as nails and very shrewd. You can bet your bottom dollar that if she finds she doesn't like you she will tell you straight out.

In answer to your question, the correct thing to do is to send an invitation to which she will reply that she finds it impossible to attend. She would be as embarrassed as much as Pop and as she would be virtually on her own at the wedding I'm almost certain that she won't want to attend.

I would like her to be there but our happiness is our first consideration and an atmosphere of strain or nervous tension would not help. So before you send out the invitations I will ask her straight out what her intentions are and we can have the matter settled.

Now that you have met my mother I think I should fill in a bit more of the picture for you as I want you to know how I see things, and not base your opinions entirely on what other people have told you.

The mistake in the first place was made when Mum and Pop married. They should never have done so as they were two quite different people. Pop was staid, cautious and quiet; Mum full of fun. Pop would rather dig in the garden and read a book by the fire while Mum was keen on dancing and was quite a sportswoman. For quite a few years she played interstate tennis and on one occasion came close to being Australian champion.

At the time when I was born the Depression hit and Pop lost his job. The home had to be sold and for some time we, as millions of others did, quietly starved, but while that helps to bind some families it caused rifts in others such as ours.

Then Pop took a job flying and for most of the time he was away, and Mum was left on her own to raise two squalling brats. This was when we lived in Queensland, where neither Pop nor Mum had any relations. If you can imagine me taking you to Adelaide, say, and then leaving you for 3 weeks every 4, you will know how Mum felt. It wasn't Pop's fault, because he had to have some sort of job, money doesn't grow on trees.

It was during this time that they started to grow apart I think. Pop saw it and he threw up flying to come to Melbourne with a position in DCA [Department of Civil Aviation], but by then it was too late.

They had been married 15 years then and in that time had lived in as many houses in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. That is no foundation for a successful marriage.

A little while after this the War broke out, our house was sold from under us and we moved again. Then my grandmother took ill and we moved to the ancestral home so Mum could look after her and it was from here that Pop joined the airforce and was away again.

All this time Pop's job took him all over Australia and Mum turned to her tennis again until it became part of her, more so in fact than her family, and though I couldn't see it at the time I can see now that she had to have some adult company and relaxation or go nuts. As she had moved around a lot she had made no lasting acquaintances and consequently when we returned to Melbourne she had to make new friends. So that by the time Pop joined the RAAF they were just two people living under the same roof by force of habit.

Just as you can't imagine your mother loving someone other than your father, so I felt when Mum told me she was going to seek a divorce from Pop, when she didn't want him but another man she had known through mu-

tual friends, for some time. It's taken me about 10 years to get used to the fact.

However, once she had the divorce she found she liked her independence and has stayed that way since, despite the fact that the other man still wants to marry her, even now after about 12 years.

Both Mum and Pop have found the right mate now but for Mum it is too late.

If you struggled this far then I'll continue with part two of the story – it really is part two, for things were vastly different from then on.

My grandmother died and grandfather felt he wanted to get away from all associations with the past so he left the home never to return. As far as I know he ostracised Mum, as did the rest of the family, and went to live with one of his old cobbers at a beach suburb and is still there.

However, that left Mum with the house, me and the other man. His name isn't of importance to you so will just call him D. He was a builder by trade before the War put him partly out of action and he saw possibilities in the old home. It was a large weatherboard house with a slate roof on a big piece of ground in Caulfield quite near the station. The land is 85′ × 150′, it is a corner block, and the house area is 23 squares. The normal house is about 12 squares, a square being 100 square feet. So he got to work and urged Mum to buy the house and turn it into three flats. Well, with a bit of aid from Dick and me, Mum bought the house and they set to and turned it into three very comfortable self-contained furnished flats.

From time to time I have put a little bit of cash into the house and most of my leaves from the Navy I have spent working there, for as you can imagine there is a lot of work to be done to keep a place like that in order, inside and out.

Well, now my efforts, such as they were, look like paying dividends. The place is getting too much for Mum to handle and for some time she has been looking for a suitable buyer for the house. A couple of weeks ago she found one, and as Dick and I are part owners she flew to Sydney to get his consent to sell, which he gave and signed the relevant papers, and then she posted the contract on to me to sign. At this stage it has not arrived but I should have it before we are very far into January.

Some time ago she wrote intimating her intentions and while we did not mention any figures she has asked me to accept all that I have put into the house in the way of hard cash together with interest, and I agreed to this.

So providing the deal goes through, and there is no earthly reason why it shouldn't, you and I will be about £400 nearer own home. I hope.

I have explained all this in detail for two reasons. One is that I don't want you to be frightened or wary of Mum's attitude towards you, and if you can understand in some measure why she is like she is today, shrewd and hard, you will feel more at ease when next you meet. It is only the unknown element of any quantity that has us scared and if it is no longer unknown, then it is licked.

The other reason is that I want you to realise why it's so all-important to me to have a home, one home, with someone I love and know for the rest of my life.

It's hard for you to understand, because you have such a wonderful family, that there are times when I feel that Mum and even Pop are little more than casual acquaintances and that from the time I was 15 till a year ago or so I just didn't want to go home to either. I just wasn't interested. When I first went to Nowra just over three years ago, weeks used to go by before I had to force myself to come to Sydney.

Since then I have broadened my outlook and tried to be less of a stranger. What son do you know of who has never driven his father's car or borrowed money from his father? Actually, Pop tried to teach me to drive once in the Vaux[hall] and I borrowed some money (the last weekend before we were married) once, but that is all.

I am not in a depressed frame of mind writing this, and I'm not the neglected, ragged, loveless urchin looking for sympathy. If you know all these little things about me you will be able to understand me a little bit and perhaps make a few allowances for me if at odd occasions I go a bit quiet.

It is now 3:30 pm and I must do some ironing or I won't get ashore. I will finish this "book" on the way to Hong Kong.

Sunday 27th in the Inland Sea

We are at sea again but not for long this time as we reach Hong Kong next Thursday 31st. After that I don't know yet what is happening and actually don't care much at the moment. These last three days have been quite hectic and I feel quite exhausted, or as the ancient Greek philosophers used to say, buggered.

Last night Skelly, Chloe and I stepped off at 1700 and walked around the shops again for an hour and a half. As I said, I had intended to buy you a doll but couldn't beat the price down enough to satisfy myself, so it will wait for a while. I did buy my gold badges for 23/9 which is quite reasonable for in Australia they would cost about 3 pounds.

As usual I saw more things that I would like and bought some. One or rather two lacquer bowls in a dark red with a couple of little fans painted on the lids. I tried to burn them with a lighted cigarette but could not, so they are good pieces. The pair cost ¥540 or 14/6. Another thing I got was a pencil box for Butch.* It is just a simple one, 4 movements to open it, and if it gets broken in the attempt then it doesn't matter. I'm thinking of getting him a microscope as I have been forbidden to buy toys.

I also saw something which I will get next time here and that is, don't laugh, a table. The one I have in mind is circular, about 3–4 feet diameter with detachable legs about 12″ long. It is made of cherry wood and looks quite charming. Something else I saw were lacquer trays, quite cheap and rather attractive.

After our shopping we retired to Kure House for a meal and then to the Fleet Club to watch the floor show. Apart from one excellent juggling act it was mainly legs and singing. The crowd was disappointed because there was no strip tease.

The club is right on the water's edge and as we were leaving, one of the motor boats from the ship was about to depart for the ship also, so we thumbed a lift back. Infinitely more comfortable than riding in these queer three-wheeled taxis on their rotten roads.

We shipped and proceeded to sail again this morning at 0800 and shortly after, mail was distributed and I received number 26 from you and an ordinary letter and a registered letter from Mum and a couple more Xmas cards, making a total of 18. Charming.

I'll answer your letter first because it's the best and then tell you about the others.

I'm glad you like the pyjamas. I was a bit worried in case they weren't quite acceptable. I guess there is no need to warn you about washing the scarf. Usually in these sorts of things the dye runs quite a lot.

*Possibly Bobbie.

I think Lesley [Goodacre] ought to go out with someone else for a little while. Boris sounds to me like a mother's pet used to having everything done for him and giving little in return, and badly in need of a swift kick in the stern-sheets. I may be quite wrong and unjustly criticising the man but that's just how he strikes me.

As we won't be back in Japan for about another six weeks I won't be able to get your material till then unless I can find it any cheaper in Hong Kong.

Well, the letter I have from Mum tells me that the house has been sold. A deposit has been made and the balance will be paid when I sign the contract of sale and forward it to the solicitors. The deal will take at least a month from now to be finalised but the house does not have to be vacated before March 20th. In that time Mum will be looking for a small house to buy, somewhere in one of the small towns in the Dandenong Ranges north of Melbourne.

My share, now our share, of the cash from the sale is dependent upon the final figure, solicitor's or agent's fees and so on but will be a little more than I figured on, and that is around £500. I don't expect the cheque for about 3 months but when it arrives I'll endorse it and send it to you to put into your bank. We are going to have our own home in next to no time.

This brings me to two other things. One is my Will. Naturally I had to make provision for Mum in the Will I made just after we left Australia because she was to a certain extent dependent on what I had invested in the home. The sale of property has changed that, so in a registered envelope I am posting you another one from Hong Kong and which you can put away. Don't lose it for many people would pay thousands for my signature, ha!

The other thing, for which you are going to say nasty things, is that I have a lot of junk in the old home and it has got to go somewhere when Mum moves. A lot of it will be useful to us and to me so I am suggesting to Mum that she pack it all up and consign to Guildford COD.

I would suggest you have it picked up and take it home. Amongst it there will be things for your trousseau, towels, lace and such, so when you get it, take out what you want, pack the rest up again and store it till I return when I can sort out what I want to keep. Don't be the least surprised at anything you come across for in my years of travelling I have picked up all sorts of queer things.

Had it not been for the fact that Pop and Nance are moving I would have asked him to look after it but he will have enough to do without worrying about my gear. Mum won't want to be worried with it so I am at a bit of a loss to know what to do. If you don't want to pick it up would you arrange for it to be picked (out of with [?]) up and stored, please. I hate to bother you like this but I don't know what else to do about it.

In her letter Mum said some very nice things about you and I know she is sincere. Also she was taken with your father and said he had a most natural and engaging manner.

As I thought, she would like to come to our wedding but under the circumstances is going to decline the invitation. She wants us to write and tell her all about it and also wants a photo to keep. That won't be difficult to arrange.

The registered letter contained the relevant papers for me to sign but I won't be able to post them till we reach HK. However, there is no immediate hurry for them.

So much for that.

In our mess we go through our cups like bulls in a china shop and there is always a shortage. For my part I overcame this shortage by buying a mug in Kure last time. It is about half a pint capacity of good china with a very pretty design of blossoms and mountains etc. painted on. Quite distinctive in fact. This time in Kure no less than 15 have been bought, 12 to send home and 3 to use in the mess by various members and I am quite peeved. No one is going to know about my table when I buy it.

One of the chaps bought a collapsible gramophone and at the moment we are being entertained by Japanese records. The gramophone folds up to a size 6″ × 9″ × 2″. Cute, isn't it?

The supply of news for the day is about finished, so for now I'll say bye again.

Monday 28th

Just a few lines tonight, as I have spent most of the evening composing a letter to the minister and one to Mum. The first took me ages and I haven't finished the other yet.

Believe it or not, I spent the whole day in shirt-sleeves. It's been quite warm and I think we must have been enjoying some of your heat.

It could be that I'm callous (?), used to life and death, or just innocent because I want to see the effects of this fire in Kowloon and my only feelings are keen interest. No compassion at all, but when I do see, perhaps my feelings will be different.

In one of your recent letters you mentioned that you had told John that we are married and asked my forgiveness. I can't say that I knew that John had been told for there was no way I could have known, but even as a non-gambler I would have bet on it and I'll bet that Bobby knows also. To me this means, not that you trust them, so much as you love them. I can trust Dick but I wouldn't tell him, for although we have a strong regard for each other, because we have trodden so many different paths, that little extra something that is between you and John and Bobby does not exist between Dick and me. Even so, I can quite realise why you did. As for asking my forgiveness, I'll reiterate what I said in one of my first letters to you. No matter what you do, or say, or think ever, nothing will give me cause to censure you. I am your husband and you are my wife and together we are going to build a happy and successful future. You are not going to help me build my house and bear me my children. We are going to build <u>our</u> home and have <u>our</u> family. We are in it together, giving as much and taking as much as each other, and the essence of success I think lies in us having absolute trust and confidence in each other. I feel that way about you, and I know that you feel the same way about me, otherwise you would not have consented to marry me. And so, whatever it is, you have no need to ask my forgiveness, for I'll stand by you to the utmost. If it is about something you are uncertain of, then I would like to feel you would want to tell me. The past is buried but the future concerns us equally.

There is a page and a half of writing there and it can be condensed into a few words: I love you, my dearest. Good night.

Tuesday 29th

The atmosphere aboard today is a little strange. At about 1100 a Fury a mile or so ahead of us suddenly burst into flames and plummeted straight into the drink. The 'copter was at the spot in a matter of a minute or so and the destroyer escort *Concord* steamed up just after. Sea

boats were lowered and searched for about an hour but all that was recovered was the pilot's helmet and a part of the seat. Three months ago in [the] UK this pilot's brother, also a pilot, was killed in an air accident. I wonder what his parents did to deserve this? This afternoon we had a short service on the flight deck, and in the captain's address it transpired that his fiancée's sister was his brother's widow. It makes me wonder.

There is a radio bod aboard, Stan Hubbard, who has a wife and a young son. His wife decided after Stan had left that she wasn't going to sit at home and do nothing so she moved out of Melbourne into the country near Warburton and rented a house, large, on a piece of land, about 3 acres for 10/- a week. Stan was displeased because she was out in the scrub and far, far from home, and virtually alone. She then built a fowl run and bought 12 layers, and started to grow vegetables. In the meantime, Stan was still performing. "Always was a backwater. Why can't she stay civilised?" And apparently told her as much. She replied saying she had bought a goat. Thinking he could have a dig at her he asked why a goat and not a cow. Her reply was that goat's milk was better for the baby and anyway with her profit from the eggs and vegetables, which she sells locally, she had bought a cow. Still trying to convince her that it wasn't a suitable life he said that it was unsafe because prowlers might come around. So she bought two fox terriers.

The last straw was when his young son brought home an eighteen inch brown snake—alive. He is now quite convinced that his family are building a menagerie and simply says, "A man can't win." My sentiments exactly. A father is twelfth man in any family.

I have just remembered a couple more points about the crockery. The crockery is packed in boxes, not weighing more than, I think, 11 lbs, and the freight for each is ¥100. A 56 piece set goes into 7 boxes, a 93 piece into 13 boxes. This is over and above the prices quoted on the list in the sample box but includes insurance. The firm guarantees to deliver complete, whatever is purchased, and any breakages will be replaced free of charge.

There is no trouble buying this crockery, so if Lesley or any of the [Oram-]Burd girls* or any one else would like any, ask them to send me the relevant info + cash and it will be as good as done. I can't, or rather I don't want to, buy anything else for people other than you or your mother or Nance, as it whittles down the quantity I can bring and send to you. Crockery, however, is, or appears to be, duty-free.

On New Year's Day we will have been married 11 weeks and almost $\frac{1}{3}$ of our time apart will be behind.

Today has been warm again. I can't get over it.

I didn't mention it before but when we arrived in Hong Kong last time I discovered that my watch coat had been stolen. Bad enough at any time but as we were to expect cold weather it was worse for I thus had no coat. You will remember when I wrote from Inchon I said I wore a duffel coat off. I kept quiet about it and reported it missing but I kept my eyes open for it. However, it did not turn up so I let it be known around that I was going to have all chiefs' and POs' messes searched, that I would recognise when I saw it because of the way the buttons were sewn on and because I had my name in the lining of the pockets. The day we arrived back in Kure Xmas Eve, there it was in the locker again, strangely enough in excellent condition still. This sort of thing goes on throughout the ship at intervals and most of my clothes I have on board are nearly in rags. One shirt is,

*Including brother John's future wife, Jacqueline.

no, two shirts are, seven years old, and I'm sure some of my singlets I wore to school. But to wear these sorts of clothes is the only way to be certain of having something to wear at all. Socks. There must be nearly 15000 black socks in this ship and so they don't last long if they are new. Now do you see why I patch them? Then there is the water. The water is condensed seawater, absolutely pure but being contained in iron tanks and running through iron pipes it inevitably collects rust. One of my sheets has dozens of huge rust spots, as have a lot of my other clothes. If you saw what I sometimes wear you'd disown me. Anyhow, who's to see in these places. If someone does they don't take any notice for they are either people living in the same conditions or Chinese, Japs and what have you.

Wednesday 30th

Duty tonight so I'm liable to drop the pen and shoot off somewhere at any moment.

Funny incident in the mess at lunchtime today. Listening to the tennis when the phone rang. John Sherwood grabbed it and said "Deuce" instead of "G2 mess". He almost blushed.

The provisional program for the next week is out and we look like staying in Hong Kong till the 11th. During that time the ship's side will be painted and the ship stored again.

On the 27th we finished our six weeks as duty carrier, which means that for the 42 days after the 27th we will be in the vicinity of HK. That is until towards the end of that time when we will be heading north again for the Japan area ready to take over as duty carrier again on February 8th. Another 42 days from then as duty carrier takes us to March 22nd and 42 days from that date takes us to May 3rd. If we do another patrol after that it means that we will finish it on or about the 14th June and be home early July. If we don't do this third patrol it means we will be home early June. Normally a ship does 12 months on a commission such as this but a carrier is different for it depends on the aircrews as to how long they can keep up with the intensive flying programmes that are carried out. A third patrol thus means 30 weeks flying and somehow I can't see it. I'm sorry I can't tell you to set a definite date, and while I don't want you to set one and then have me turn up after it, I don't want to come home and fool around for weeks waiting. So could you leave it as long as possible and then if I am still in the dark, make it June in the hope that I will be home that month? I've never been married before so I don't know how easy it is to change dates that have been set. If it won't upset things too much I think June would be the date to bank on.*

On your side of the church you may be strong on relations but I bet I have more sailors than you. Four in the mess told me that they are coming so don't be surprised if we get a Japanese tea set or something. They said they were going to bring along "middle watch" mugs to drink out of just to see me perform. When you have decided on how many invitations you are going to send out, let me know how many you want me to invite and I'll send you the names and addresses.

Time has beaten me. The mail closes in five minutes so I'll have to close. Anyhow, it wasn't a bad effort.

Tomorrow I'll write again in answer to more of your mail (I hope). Until then, my beloved, all my fondest love.

Your devoted husband
George XXX

*26 June 1954, as it turned out.







Probably at South Steyne Beach, Manly, Sydney.



George acquired Carl the German Shepherd to keep Shirley company in Huskisson when he was away at sea. Carl "rescued" Shirley from the water every time she went for swim, gently taking her wrist in his mouth and pulling her back to shore.

UNCLASSIFIED MESSAGE

FM NAS NOWRA
TO ACNB INFO FOCAF
D1Ø
FOIC EA
TOBRUK

PRIORITY
12Ø538Z

NAVY OFFICE MESSAGE ØØØ625 (-) AIR RADIO COMPLEMENT AT ALBATROSS IS 55 PER CENT SHORT ALSO ELECTRICAL SUB LT STEVENS IS BUILDING HOUSE AT HUSKISSON MAINLY BY OWN LABOUR (-) HOUSE IS HALF BUILT
-2- REQUEST SEA APPOINTMENT BE DEFERRED IN VIEW OF ABOVE REASONS
-3- D1Ø HAS BEEN CONSULTED PRIOR TO DESPATCH OF THIS MESSAGE

12Ø538Z MAR 57

DIST, S2 CC1 L(6)

SN17 PL TOD-Ø542Z EA 12/3/57







The house that George built

In 1957, George took leave from the Navy to build the couple's first house. He bought books on building, with step-by-step diagrams showing how to saw and drill and lay bricks, and bought several hand tools that are still in use 60 years later. Shirley worked as his labourer. She called him Corky (a pet form of George) and he called her Tom, as befits a builder's labourer.

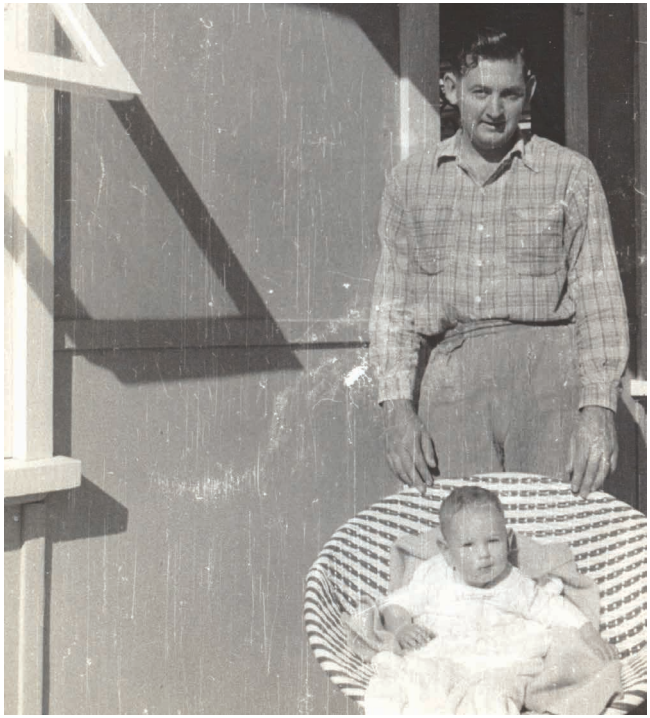
He cut all of the timber by hand and hammered in all of the nails by hand. It was clad in fibro-asbestos sheets, and why he didn't contract mesothelioma will remain a mystery. Being a qualified electrician, he later (not initially) wired up the house. Being a self-taught man, he did all of the plumbing, joinery, roofing and glazing himself too. For heating, they installed a slow-combustion stove, which kept the house warm in winter and provided hot water for the bath and shower. It also cooked all of the meals.

Out the back they kept chickens for their eggs. In those days, chicken feed was supplied in cotton fabric bags, typically striped in pastel colours, which Shirley would unpick to make clothes.

The house, at 22 Owen Street, Huskisson, was a 3-minute walk from the shops in Owen Street and a 1-minute walk to the cinema. The cinema was the social hub of the village. Two of their neighbours from their previous rented accommodation were Mr and Mrs Van. When a movie was showing, Mr Van would place a brick in the oven for an hour and then wrap it in "a good-quality *Herald*" so he could rest his feet on it in the cold cinema.

Mr Van was an early form of television remote control. When George was away at sea, Shirley would visit the Vans for meals and company. Mrs Van would issue the instruction, "Nine, please, John," and the channel would change. The television was an early colour model: the screen was covered with a sheet of blue cellophane, ostensibly to mask the show in the picture, which came all the way from Sydney, 100 miles to the north. A few years later, Shirley's mother's back-fence neighbour, who kept budgerigahs in an aviary, acquired a blue budgie that was called Johnnie Van.

George was away at sea in April 1960 when Matthew was born, and it was 6 weeks before he got to meet his first born. So when Shirley went into labour, Mr Van drove her to the Shoalhaven Base Hospital in Nowra. He then brought her back home again. George had wanted to call his son Simon. Shirley got in first.





George's medals: 1939–45 Star, Pacific Star, 1939–45 War Medal, 1939–45 Austalian Service Medal, Australian Active Service Medal 1945–75 with Malaya clasp, United Nations Service Medal with Korea clasp, Australian Service Medal 1945–75 with FESR clasp & Korea clasp, Australian Defence Medal, Elizabeth II Coronation Medal 1953, Australian General Service Medal Korea.

Back-breaking work

As George describes in his interview with UNSW later, he injured his back severely on board ship in Korea. In correspondence with the Department of Veterans' Affairs in 2007, he detailed further injury:

"Humping AN/APS-4 (Ash bomb) complete assemblies from Firefly aircraft in the hangar, through the very confined space of the hangar air locks to the radar repair room and up on to the work bench for repair. Then the reverse procedure to get the serviceable unit mounted again on the aircraft. Can't remember the weight but suspect it was about 50 kg. Required two men to lift it. All conditions of weather – some fair, some foul, sometimes freezing cold (Korea), sometimes stinking hot (Singapore, Philippines, Malaysia).

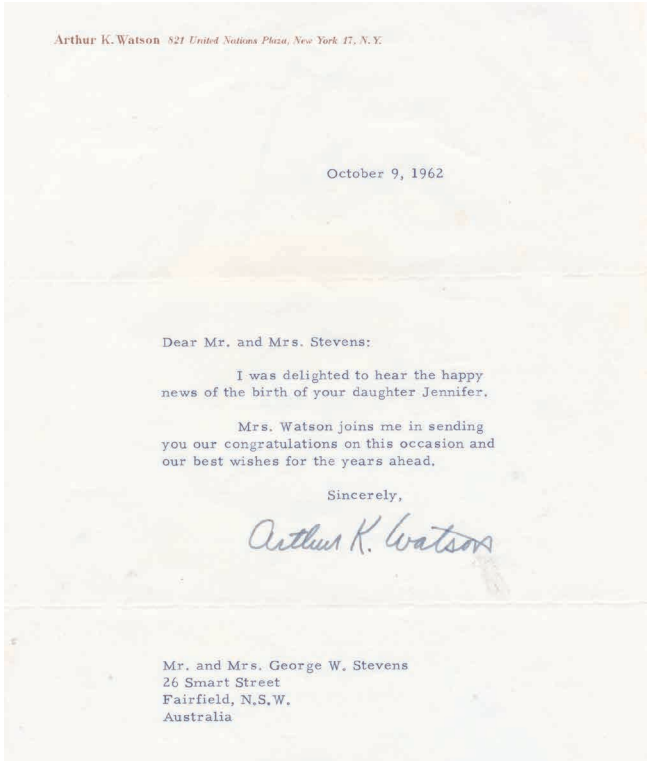
"Lugging perhaps 100 non-directional sonobuoys into the air radio repair workshop one deck below the main deck, putting charged batteries in them, testing each one, then moving all into the alcove ready for squadron personnel to collect them. Weight of each not much, perhaps 10 kg, but when multiplied by quantities became a lengthy back-breaking task."

Resignation from the Navy

In a letter to an old naval buddy, George wrote:

"As you might remember, I changed from General Service to Fleet Air Arm. All went well until after 6 years as a PO I asked my Divisional Officer when I would be advanced to CPO. His reply was that as the Navy had an 'establishment', and that because of time in rank there were others ahead of me on the promotion list, I would see out my 12-year engagement as a PO. However, the Navy was short of Electrical Officers, and there were vacancies. So that's how I got a commission and became one the the Navy's last 'thin ringers'.

"My satisfaction of wardroom existence was not long lived, and after another 6 years of no further promotion because of 'lack of seniority', I resigned. But it was deeper than that. Bad enough seeing others, some absolute no-hopers, being promoted over me simply because they had more time in the position, but also seeing quite a few getting drunk each lunch time, and getting their heads down to sleep it off when they should have been doing their job. Very few believed me at the time, but three years later they changed their views after the *Voyager* enquiries revealed the extent of Naval officer addiction to alcohol."



Arthur K. Watson 821 United Nations Plaza, New York 17, N.Y.

October 9, 1962

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Stevens:

I was delighted to hear the happy news of the birth of your daughter Jennifer.

Mrs. Watson joins me in sending you our congratulations on this occasion and our best wishes for the years ahead.

Sincerely,

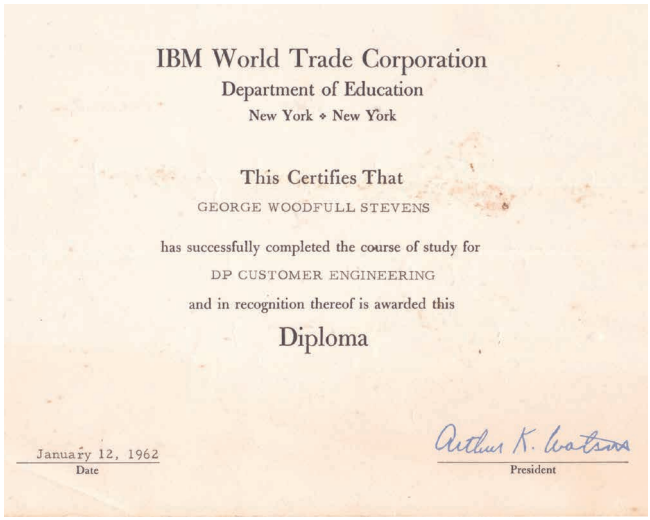
Arthur K. Watson

Mr. and Mrs. George W. Stevens
26 Smart Street
Fairfield, N.S.W.
Australia

Letter of congratulations on the birth of Jennifer, signed by Arthur K. Watson.



40 Grenfell Road, Mount Waverley.



IBM World Trade Corporation
Department of Education
New York • New York

This Certifies That
GEORGE WOODFULL STEVENS
has successfully completed the course of study for
DP CUSTOMER ENGINEERING
and in recognition thereof is awarded this
Diploma

January 12, 1962
Date

Arthur K. Watson
President

Diploma in Customer Engineering, signed by Arthur K. Watson, son of IBM's famous Thomas J. Watson.



George liked to claim that he led a life of undiscovered crime in IBM.

1961 to 1986, IBM

"Being full of my own importance, I figured I would have difficulty in selecting from a number of executive positions that would be offered me upon my entry to civvy street. After 4 months of living off rapidly diminishing capital, and with one wife, two children and three mortgages to support, I tucked my tail between my legs and took a job at David Jones selling men's jumpers over the counter. A few months later I landed a job with Channel 9 on the outside broadcast van. This was a sinecure, but football and I don't happily mix."

In 1961, George finally struck lucky when he managed to talk his way into a job at IBM. In those days, IBM had a maximum age limit for intake of 25 years. George was already 32 years old, but he managed to persuade IBM that he would be an advantage to the company. He wasn't wrong.

In the 1960s and 1970s, and perhaps even today, the letters "IBM", which really stand for International Business Machines, were held by new employees to stand for "Isn't it Bloody Marvellous!" Those who stayed with the organisation found that in order to advance, it was necessary to move around; "IBM" then stood for "I'll Be Moved". Those who held on for too long eventually learned that it became the "Institution of Broken Marriages".

George joined IBM as a Customer Engineer. His many years as a Radio Engineer in the Royal Australian Navy made him an ideal choice in the days when computers still had lots of moving parts. George's first job was to go to customers' sites with his tool kit and spare parts, pull apart the massive mechanical computers and replace the parts that had broken. For many years he kept boxes of many such parts, some of which his son, Matthew, still holds. In September 1962, only a year after George joined IBM, his daughter, Jennifer, was born. The family still has a letter sent to George from Arthur Watson, the son of IBM's most famous head, Thomas J. Watson, congratulating him on Jenny's birth.

"I landed a job with IBM as what they called a Customer Engineer. This entailed maintaining some of their clapped-out, old, big accounting machines that quite literally weighed more than 1 ton. The hardest part of that job was in crawling inside the guts of these monsters to replace a worn gearbox or type bar assembly, while wearing a business suit. But after 12 months of persevering it paid off, and I was selected to train on one of IBM's first solid-state computers. The mainframe was as big as an upright piano, and it had the huge capacity of 12 kilobits (not bytes, but bits). Training was no picnic. We started lectures at midnight, broke for 1 hour's breakfast at 4:00 am, then had practical experience until 8:00 am. But that lasted only 6 weeks."

In 1963, under the banner "I'll Be Moved", George was transferred from Sydney to Melbourne for what was then stated to be 2 years. So the family uprooted from their house at 14 Shackel Avenue, Guildford, in Sydney, and moved to a brand-new spec home in the Melbourne suburb of Mount Waverley, at 40 Grenfell Road.

While in Melbourne, George re-established relations with his mother, Cecily, who was then living in semi-rural retirement in The Patch, where she bred prize-winning liliums. She named her dog and one *Lilium* hybrid 'Jennifer'. Cecily had remarried in 1944,



At an IBM conference in Manila, The Philippines.





Above: George, Matthew, Cecily, Jenny, Shirley, David Davidson (squatting) and Jennifer the dog, in Cecily's garden at The Patch.



Above: 16 Glendowan Road, Mount Waverley.
Left: George demolished the front steps to prepare for the house extension.

to a WW1 soldier called David Patrick Davidson, who had lost some of his marbles during the War. George also visited his father, Fred, who was living in Glen Iris with his second wife, Nance (née Sim) and their son Ian, who was 15 years George's junior.

Although the move to Mount Waverley was meant to be for 2 years only, George was still working for IBM in Melbourne in 1966 when he was transferred back to Sydney for 6 months. The family lived in a flat in Grasmere Road, Cremorne. After 6 months, they moved back to Melbourne.

The man who lived only two doors up the road, at number 40 Grenfell Road, was Bryan Williams. Bryan's daughter Ann was in Matthew's class at school. Brian's father quite coincidentally owned one of the lighthouse keepers' cottages at Aireys Inlet, where George's grandfather, George Frederick William Stevens, had lived, so the family got to visit the ancestral home once or twice.

When Matthew expressed an interest in becoming a Cub, there was a long waiting list, so George joined the First West Waverley Scout Group as a volunteer to get Matthew to the top of the list. He took the nickname Husky, from Huskisson.

In 1972, 7 years into the 2-year transfer to Melbourne, George and Shirley sold the house in Grenfell Road and bought an old house at 16 Glendowan Road, Mount Waverley. The day the family moved in, 2 September 1972, Shirley's mother, Anne Jane Walker Martyn (née Woods), died in Sydney.

George spent the next year extending the house, hiring builders to do the bulk of the work, and building an above-ground swimming pool. In 1973, George was offered a promotion and transfer to IBM's office in Wellington, New Zealand. Exactly 1 year to the day after the family moved in, they moved to New Zealand.

The personnel manager in IBM New Zealand had been struggling. In those days, IBM did not sack staff, and instead did its best to look after its employees. So George was transferred to support the personnel manager, taking the special title of "Manager of Personnel". This was a 2-year contract. Initially the family rented at 1 Harbour View Terrace, Khandalla, one of the northern suburbs of Wellington. The house looked over almost all of Port Nicholson. After about 3 months, the family moved to another rented house, 2 North Terrace, Kelburn. North Terrace sits around the corner from the famous Wellington cable car. Matthew used to catch the cable car on his way to school. Shirley used to catch it to go shopping in town. George sometimes caught it too, but North Terrace lies next to the Wellington Botanic Gardens, which are bounded on the lower side by The Terrace, home of IBM, so George used to walk to work, taking about 15 minutes.

The climate, unhappy children, separation from family and a variety of other reasons prompted George to cut his 2-year contract short at 17 months in December 1974 to take a senior personnel role back in Australia. The family finally moved back to Sydney, only 9 years after the 2-year temporary move to Melbourne.

In 1975, George and Shirley bought 26 Bent Street, Greenwich, a beautiful, rambling sandstone and double-brick bungalow with views up the Lane Cove River for a then-staggering $177 500. George immediately began renovating, rebuilding and extending the house, and dug out the sandstone to create an in-ground swimming pool. But he contracted a possible infective



26 Bent Street, Greenwich.



George started to dig out the ground for the in-ground swimming pool at 26 Bent Street.



George borrowed Shirley's cousin Barbara's son Peter's truck to pick up second-hand timber, with which he began the renovations to 26 Bent Street, Greenwich, in 1975.

arthritis and had to stop his renovations for several months. Unable to sit still, he took up rug-making and leather-working. This prompted him and Shirley, with Shirley's cousin Betty Purnell, who lived locally, to start up the Cove Craft Cooperative, which was still running 40 years later in Lane Cove shopping centre.

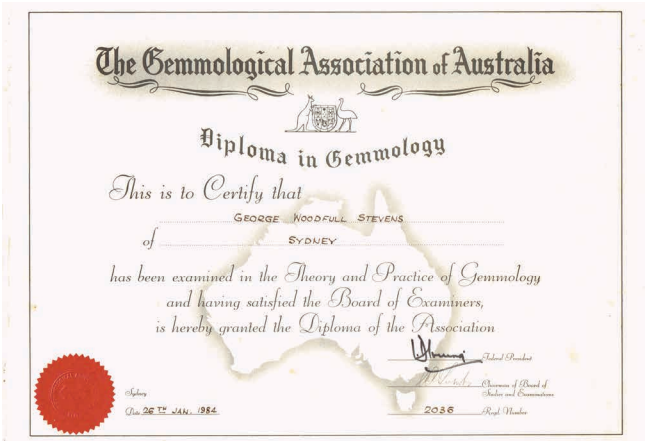
In 1977, to build his income, George took out a second mortgage and then a third mortgage on the house to set up a boat hire company, Glendowan Cruisers. He bought two old cabin cruisers, named *Boronia* and *Cassia*, from Halvorsen's boatyard at Bobbin Head. George restored the cruisers and rented them out on weekends. Every weekend he would drive up to Pittwater, where he would ready the boats, greet the customers and see them off. Then he would drive back the next day to meet the customers, clean the boats, refuel and repair any damage. One customer was the famous ABC journalist Bill Peach. But eventually the work proved too hard, and George sold both boats, having only broken even.

In 1979, George was asked to run a conference for IBM in Manila, the Philippines. His role was to meet and greet the speakers and guests and to make sure that they had what they needed. One such guest was the famous British amateur astronomer Patrick Moore, who had a well deserved reputation as an eccentric. On arrival at the hotel, he discovered that he couldn't find his suitcase key. "George! George!" he said. "I can't find my suitcase key." They looked everywhere. Not in any of his pockets, not in his briefcase. Vanished. So George organised a hotel employee to open the case. A couple of hours later, Patrick Moore appeared, jubilant: "George! George!" he said. "I found the key!" "Where was it?" asked George. "In my shoe."

George worked in either the IBM Centre, then in Kent Street, or the Caltex Building, directly opposite. Most days he would walk the few hundred metres and hundred or so steps down to the Bay Street wharf in Greenwich and catch one of the Rosman ferries to Circular Quay, and then walk a few hundred metres to Kent Street. He declared it the gentleman's way to travel. The Rosman ferries were owned by old Charlie Rosman, who used to captain one of them. One day the deckhand was off sick and the ferry master was having to drive the ferry and tie off. George, being qualified, offered to steer while the master took care of tying off and collecting fares. The master gratefully accepted, so George drove the ferry all the way to Circular Quay. Rounding Greenwich Point, the ferry passed another of Rosman's ferries, with old Charlie Rosman at the helm. Rosman's gaze never left George until he was out of sight. We never heard what happened to the master.

In 1984, with a view to retiring rich, George enrolled in a Diploma of Gemmology course through the Gemmological Association of Australia and a Japanese language course. The plan was to become fluent enough in Japanese (which he had learned in the Navy during his visits to Japan in 1953 and 1960) to be able to import gemstones from around the world and sell in Japan. He acquired a diploma and published a gemmology study guide on the side, and obtained a certificate of Japanese language, but the plan to become a rich gem merchant never eventuated.

In 1986, his mother, Cecily Woodfull Davidson (formerly Stevens, née Pescott), died in Leeton, NSW, where she had lived for several years in a retirement home near her older son, Dick, in Griffith. On learning of his mother's death, his demeanour didn't change, but his shoulders dropped slightly.



The Gemmological Association of Australia

Diploma in Gemmology

This is to Certify that

GEORGE WOODFULL STEVENS

of SYDNEY

has been examined in the Theory and Practice of Gemmology and having satisfied the Board of Examiners, is hereby granted the Diploma of the Association

Dated 26TH JAN. 1984

2036

Part of a plan to get rich. George studied gemmology and Japanese at the same time with the intention of importing gems into Australia and selling them in Japan.



The *Boronia*, another plan to get rich. The company was called Glendowan Cruisers.



4 Kingslangley Road, Greenwich.

Finally, in 1986, just short of his 25th anniversary, George retired from IBM at the age of 57. This was to be the first of five retirements.

1986 to 2011, Retirement

Following his retirement from IBM in 1986, George finished renovating 26 Bent Street and bought three investment properties in Hobart, which he paid to have renovated and then rented out. He eventually had to sell these as the capital was not producing a reasonable return on investment.

Shortly after his retirement, his assistant and protégé from IBM Melbourne in the late 1960s, Ian Penman, was headhunted away from IBM by Compaq Computer in the USA to open the company's Australian office. So from 1988 to 1989, George went to work for Compaq (then called CCA Systems until the company acquired the rights to the name in Australia) under Penman in the company's first office in Harris Street, Ultimo. Relations with Penman became strained for reasons George would never divulge, and what had been a firm family friendship died.

Following his retirement from Compaq (his second retirement) in 1989, George again found that he needed intellectual stimulation, and, from late 1990 to the end of 1991, worked as a trainer for the Computer Industry Training & Technology Corporation, having been invited. When the money for the contract ran out, he retired for the third time.

In late 1989, motivated by the drive to ensure financial security for himself and Shirley, George sold the house at 26 Bent Street for what was then an enormous sum of about $650 000 and, in early 1990, bought 4 Kingslangley Road, Greenwich, just a few hundred metres north, and renovated it with the intention of selling at a profit. He spent the best part of 1990–91 adding value until a serious accident stopped him for many months. Deciding that a big tree in the back yard needed pruning, he set an aluminium extension ladder against the branch and climbed up to saw the branch off by hand with a bush saw. He didn't cut the wrong end of the branch off (the end holding the ladder). What the family concluded later was that the top of the ladder only just overlapped the branch, and in sawing up and down, George set the branch in motion up and down. At some point, the branch cleared the top of the ladder and George came down. Unfortunately, his right leg fell through the ladder, and as he hit the ground, his weight on the ladder caused the rung to crush his lower leg, and both bones snapped in a total of three places. His screaming alerted Shirley, who called an ambulance. George then spent the next several weeks in Royal North Shore Hospital (just a short walk away!) recovering from surgery to pin and screw the bones back in place. It took George months to be able to walk properly again. However, over several years, the screws, which are intended to remain forever in place, gradually worked their way out again and eventually broke the surface of the skin on George's shin, and he had to go back to RNSH to have them removed. This time he acquired a hospital infection, which took months of antibiotic treatment to clear.

In late 1991, having improved 4 Kingslangley as much as he could, he sold that (at a profit), and in early 1992 bought 139 Greenwich Road. This was a two-storey house (originally built as a single storey and extended up at some point) with partial views of the Lane Cove River, right next door to the small lower cluster



139 Greenwich Road, Greenwich.



Right: In 1996, George and Shirley toured Greece and Turkey on a Russian cruise ship and visited Gallipoli.

of shops on Greenwich Road. He bought this for a bargain price of about $440 000 and spent the next few years renovating it, doing most of the work himself. This included removing the internal staircase and turning the two floors into separate dwellings. George and Shirley lived upstairs (with the view) and rented out the ground floor to a quiet tenant. (The view was obscured by three cypress pines. George received permission from Lane Cove Council to prune the trees, but by only one-third. So he removed one-third. Then he removed another one-third. Finally, he removed the last one-third.)

During 1991, he researched and wrote a history of the RAN Radio Mechanics (RMs) from the end of WW2 to their eventual development into radar technicians. In 1992, with a couple of former RMs, he founded the Radio Mechanics' Association, which eventually collected about 600 members, and organised several of the biennial reunions. He later published three histories of RAN radar in 2005 and 2006.

Finding employment work rewarding, in early 1992 he joined Grey Power, an employment firm set up to place older people with decades of experience back in the workforce where their skills would be valued. Later the same year he retired for the fourth time.

Having finished the renovations, George once again needed to use his brain, so he joined Paxus, an information technology employment agency. Unfortunately, back pain, which George traced to his Naval service, forced him to retire in 1993. This was his fifth and final retirement! But this wasn't an excuse to stop. Instead, he took over as manager and honorary treasurer of the Greenwich Community Centre and as coordinator of the Greenwich Peninsula Neighbourhood Watch for 5 years. For his work with the Community Centre, he received honourable mentions in the Lane Cove Council Citizenship Award in 1996 and 1997. For his efforts with Neighbourhood Watch, he was awarded a NSW Police Service Certificate of Appreciation in 1997.

George's older brother, Dick (Richard William), died in September 1996.

A chance encounter with a neighbour in Greenwich put George on the path to organising a fundraising event for the neighbour's severely disable daughter. Isabelle Heim, then 12 years old, had been born with severe cerebral palsy, and her parents couldn't find the money to give her round-the-clock care. So George and Shirley stepped in, and following 4 months of community activity to raise awareness and generate support, on Saturday 27 April 1996, they held a fundraising function in the Greenwich Community Hall, at which they raised $16 000. Isabelle finally got the care she needed.

The NSW Spastic Society was impressed and asked George and Shirley to undertake a similar venture for 8-year-old Robert Higman of Warrawee, who also had cerebral palsy. So in 1997, they held an event in the St Ives Community Hall, attended by various local politicians and sports players, and raised $23 000. George later wrote: "The successful format included many activities in preparation leading to stage performances by youngsters in the area, followed by auction of donated items and services. Plenty of finger food and drinks were made available. In both cases, the volunteer team comprised about 70 people filling roles such as marketing, advertising, catering, producer, lighting, raffles, lucky door prizes, sound, stage management, bar tenders, props, ticketing, treasurer, art work, compere,



12 Minerva Avenue, Vincentia.



Left: Anzac Day march in Huskisson, ca. 1997.



Alice Mae's 21st birthday party, 24 March 2002, Vincentia, NSW.

auctioneer and so on. Support and donations were garnered from all manner of people and organisations. About 50 items were offered for auction and included Beauty Salon gift voucher, bottles of wine, cricket bat signed by Pakistani team, Sydney Swans jumper signed by Paul Kelly, creation of a Will, one week holiday in a beach cottage, dinner for two at Centrepoint Restaurant, two return tickets to Broken Hill, 15 shrubs in pots and many others. A fiercely contested item at Robert's function was dinner for four at Parliament House, Canberra, with [local member] Brendan Nelson as host and coffee afterwards with [Prime Minister] John Howard." The $23 000 bought Robert a special walker that allowed him to get around without having to rely on others. For their efforts, George and Shirley received a Certificate of Appreciation from the Spastic Society.

By 1998, George felt that he had achieved all he was going to achieve locally, and, fed up with the increasing noise and congestion in Sydney, he and Shirley sold 139 Greenwich Road and moved to Vincentia, on Jervis Bay, not far from Huskisson, where they had built their first house. There they bought 12 Minerva Avenue, high up a steep hill with views over Jervis Bay. They bought the house – then a single-level house with a double garage beneath – from the owner–builder, and commissioned the vendor to extend it, converting the double garage into accommodation for visitors and building a new garage upslope, with a covered walkway linking it to the house. George then got stuck into local events, becoming honorary treasurer of the Shoalhaven Grape Growers and Wine Makers Association for 5 years (managing to make several batches of barely drinkable wine at home) and a committee member of the Huskisson branch of the RSL. He gave lectures to both the Wine Makers Association and the local chapter of the University of the Third Age on a variety of topics.

While in Vincentia, George met an exhibitor at an art show and, recognising his name and his gold tooth, asked him whether he had attended primary school in Melbourne in 1939. He had. Stuart King had become an accomplished water colour painter and had retired to Vincentia.

In 1983, after the family's cat, Dibbies, died, a neighbour in Greenwich, Lana Wells, who was a member of the Cat Protection Society, heard of the family's distress and paid to fly two kittens from Melbourne to Sydney from her former husband, Derryn Hinch, a radio and television presenter, whose then-wife, the actress Jackie Weaver, had asked him to give them away. By 2002, one of the cats, Alice Mae, had reached the age of 21 years. So George and Shirley threw a 21st birthday party for the cat, who attended wearing a pearl necklace and got to help cut the cake, looking totally nonplussed by all the fuss.

In 2003, George's increasing health problems and Shirley's signs of mild stroke prompted George to sell 12 Minerva Avenue and move back to Sydney. They settled on Berowra Heights, where their daughter, Jenny, and her family lived, within reasonable distance of medical services. They bought 78 Lonsdale Avenue, a two-storey house bordering Muogamarra Nature Reserve, where all manner of lizards, birds, wallabies and snakes paid regular visits. They converted the ground-floor former garage into a studio, where Jenny operated her fledgling fitness gym before she moved into shop premises. George engaged a local builder to extend and improve the house. During 2004 and



78 Lonsdale Avenue, Berowra Heights.

2005, following multiple bank closures, he gained local support for a new community bank and succeeded in persuading Bendigo Bank to open a branch in Berowra Heights.

Finally admitting that he could no longer handle stairs, George sold 78 Lonsdale Avenue in 2007 and bought 16 Wymah Cresent, Berowra Heights. This was a single-level three-bedroom house on a quiet residential street and a level block. He engaged the same local builder as before to extend the house with a garage, workshop, office, sewing room and second bathroom, all joined to the original house with an airy atrium.

Putting together Shirley's family's history, George became interested in Shirley's grandfather, John Martyn, a Cornish mine manager who married a Scottish-American woman in Pennsylvania and moved to Australia, where he ran several mines in NSW and Victoria. George made contact with the Southern Sons of Cornwall and, as well as compiling the Martyn family history (and solving a family mystery involving Jack Ellis, an uncle by marriage to a Martyn daughter and one of Australia's very first WW1 Light Horsemen), became honorary treasurer and newsletter editor for the group, and organised the "Cornish Cultural Celebration", which was held in Nowra in 2009. This interest in Cornish history also led him to research the history of the Cornish fishing boats which played a large role in the evacuation of Allied soldiers from Dunkirk in May–June 1940. "It is an account of the role played by Cornish fishermen in that remarkable event, the Dunkirk evacuation. May–June 2010 will be the 70th anniversary of what was named Operation Dynamo. During the 9 days and nights between Saturday 26 May and Monday 3 June 1940, 1,432 vessels (about 650 being little boats) rescued 338,226 Allied soldiers trapped on the Dunkirk beaches." He published his findings as a booklet in 2010.

By 2009, George's health had deteriorated owing to right heart failure, which left him breathless on walking only a few paces. Shirley was already showing early signs of vascular dementia and was increasingly unable to look after George, and George had no energy to keep up with Shirley. So Jenny spent weeks engaging in-home services through the Department of Veterans' affairs, all at no cost to George. With the exception of cleaners, George and Shirley dismissed all helpers, including home-care nurses. Having been forced to look after himself since the age of 15 and not knowing how to do otherwise, George was unable to accept the help offered.

But he didn't stop working his brain, and in 2010, he joined a national project to generate interest in and to build funds to construct a Boer War Memorial in Anzac Avenue, Canberra. To this end, he set up a stall in the Berowra Heights shopping centre in February 2010 to encourage interest in the project. Unfortunately, he caught a viral infection there and was admitted to hospital. Used to making his own decisions and dissatisfied with the way the hospital was being run, he discharged himself. This happened several times. By now, Shirley had reached the "sundowning" phase of dementia, and became convinced every evening that George was trying to kill her. She would barricade herself in her bedroom and call Jenny and Matthew repeatedly. And then every morning she had no recollection of the previous evening's worries. By now George was physically unable to care for himself but refused all help, and would often fall over and be unable to get up. Several times he spent all night on the floor, while Shirley cautiously stepped over him.



12 Wymah Crescent, Berowra Heights.

George's younger half-brother, Ian, died in July 2010, aged 63.

George's health continued to decline, and to decades-long spondylosis and heart failure, he added cancer of the spleen, myelodysplasia (a disorder of the bone marrow, which renders it unable to produce enough red blood cells), an enlarged prostate gland and renal failure. Following chemotherapy for the spleen cancer (which apparently worked), he then underwent laser ablation therapy for the enlarged prostate. Unfortunately, although this cured the problem, it left him incontinent. Back at home and fed up with subsisting entirely on steamed chicken and mashed potato, which by now was all that Shirley remembered how to cook, and frustrated by Shirley's insistence on tidying away everything, including his four-times-a-day medications, George hit on the pragmatic, if flawed, solution of taking all of his pills in one go. Not surprisingly, this didn't work, and Matthew tried to admit him to hospital. The triage nurse at the private hospital refused to admit him and declared that there was nothing wrong with him. Matthew then took him to the public hospital, where he was admitted and found to have had a heart attack. He stayed there for a month while the medical staff restored his medication regimen and stabilised him.

By this time – early 2011 – it was clear that neither George nor Shirley could take care of themselves any longer, and after locking himself in the bathroom and refusing to come out, George eventually accepted the inevitable and agreed to move in to a nursing home. Shirley moved in with him, ostensibly to "look after him", although she needed just as much care.

George's health then followed a sawtooth decline during 2011, dropping noticeably before improving slightly. But by Christmas Day 2011, his condition was very poor, and he didn't take part in Christmas lunch. On 27 December he slipped into a coma, and he died peacefully early on 28 December. He would have been surprised but delighted by the huge turnout at his funeral.

Afterword

A view of the future

As I start to write this, one of my philosophies comes to mind. This is "How do I know where I am going lest I first know whence I came". To explain this in simple terms by using an analogy, if a magician picked me up and dumped me on a road somewhere in the Western Australian outback, I really wouldn't know which direction to take in order to secure my future. On the other hand, if when dumping me the magician said, "That road is the way to Esperance", then by using this key and other information such the direction of sunrise and/or the position of the Southern Cross, I would have some clue as to what my future might hold. So it is with this paper in that having the benefit of more than 70 years of life's experiences, I am in a better position to postulate my future than if I were a much younger person. That is, I would have a good handle on "whence I came". Further, by extrapolating my perception of my future, I can also make a fair stab at predicting what the future may hold for my children and their children.

This paper deals with my topic in four time frames. The first is recent history, i.e. the last 100 or so years. This is the "whence I came" bit. The second time frame is the next 15 years – from 2005 to say 2020, at which



In 2000, George and Shirley visited Belgium and France and toured the WWI battlefields.





George's four grandsons were very important to him. From left, William, Robert, Nicholas and Timothy.

latter date I'll likely be pushing up daisies as the saying goes. The third is 2020 to 2035, at which latter year my children will be as old as I am now (2005). The fourth is 2035 to 2065, at which latter year my grandchildren will be getting close to my age in 2005.

My theme is that the world we have experienced over the last 100 years will gradually but inexorably start to change in 2020 or thereabouts. By 2035 the extent of the change will be dramatic. This will be the point when civilisation will start to become what many want today – a world of less frantic pace and therefore less personal stress, less preoccupation with greed, easier lifestyle. By 2065 the change will be complete and the world population will start to feel—[never completed]

The world of the year 2065

Not in my lifetime, but certainly by the time my grandsons are my present age, the world will be a vastly different place. Most of the world's reserves of non-renewable energy sources will be depleted close to zero. These include mineral oil, natural gas, coal and uranium. The only mineral oil available will be used solely for machinery lubrication because it will be too expensive to simply burn. This means that much of our present forms of transport, viz. diesel or petrol-engined cars, all aircraft, all shipping, the majority of heavy diesel-powered machinery, will have no available energy source – mineral oil. There will be no aircraft, but maybe some dirigibles. Major intracontinental transport will be electric train. Heavy road transport numbers will be significantly reduced, and these vehicles will be powered by diesel engines running on vegetable oils. Motor cars will be small lightweight vehicles powered by combined ethanol/battery electric motors. Major intercontinental transport will be by solar-assisted sailing ships. Heavy machinery at remote locations, e.g. mines, will be powered by the same type of diesel engine used in heavy road transport. Timber and bricks will become the main building materials, and buildings over four levels above ground will cease to exist. Reticulated electric power will be [distributed] via a national grid, into which all manner of powered generation will be fed. This will include electricity from wind farms, wave energy, tidal energy, geothermal energy, biomass energy, solar energy, hydro energy.

There will certainly be other opportunities such as plastic-reinforced laminated timber to replace steel joists. Macadamised roads where the sealing surface is no longer tar but a synthetic product will become the norm. Recycling of all metals, especially copper and iron, will become extremely important because of the twin effects of depleted natural resources and the difficulties of constructing and operating heavy machinery.

However, there will be some exciting side benefits. The ozone layer will recover. The arms race, the armament industry and wars will diminish in intensity and frequency. Because of reduced mobility, the quality of family life will improve. The huge advances in electronic communication which have been made during the past 90 years, and what is likely to occur during the next few decades, will mean that human communication will not be inhibited or impaired by limitations of physical movement.



In 2007, George received a grant from the Commonwealth Government for publication of a naval history. He is shown here with the Hon. Philip Ruddock, who was then then Foreign Minister and the local member for Berowra.



Berowra Heights, ca. 2009.

Appendix 1 – Bibliography

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Appendix 2 – Interview by Sara Smyth-King, April 2009

Macquarie University, Faculty of Arts, Department of Sociology, Australian and Global Societies

Conduct an in-depth life-history interview then analyse the intersection of history and social structure/conditions in the life you have examined.

The interviewee for this analysis is George Stevens, born into "The *Lucky* Generation? A generation whose childhood and adolescence were darkened by the twin shadows of the Great Depression and World War II" (ref). Those born into this time learned the rigorous lessons that massive economic down turn, unprecedented unemployment and worldwide upheaval brought to bear upon them. These macro institutional, social and cultural shifts caused enormous pressure in peoples everyday lives, shaping the personalities and ethics of the Lucky Generation by "forging reoccurring themes of loyalty, saving, the work ethic, the sense of mutual obligation and patriotism" (ref) into their psyche. These ethics became the foundation by which many people growing up in this time set the course for their whole life's journey. George Stevens was no exception, and it is how these factors affected his family, work and social life, that form this analysis of his life history.

George Stevens was born in Brisbane in 1929 and early life was remembered fondly despite his family being poor, however, in 1937 a move to Melbourne altered everything. No longer were sights, sounds and places familiar, he was disenfranchised from his usual social norms, city life versed country town (as suburban Brisbane was then), and this culture clash caused him

much anxiety. His father joined the air force during the war, and was frequently absent. Lacking the attention she needed, his mother left the family for another man, then when his elder brother went on to join the army, George was left to be cared for by his aging and ill grandparents. This unhappy situation became the catalysis for the young teenager to leave home early at 15 years old. Leaving home early was not uncommon in the 1930s and '40s, however, it was more prevalent among lower income families where the lack of "parental investment in their children, including economic and emotional resources, influenced generationally the progress that young adults made on their own economic and family pathways" (ref).

Pressures from both inside his own family and the accumulated effects of a society at war, pushed George out into the world on his own. He joined the lighthouse supply ship fleet that serviced the Victorian south coast. This Was in George Stevens own words "magic – it really was – high adventure, all of a sudden I felt like I was with a family." A telling statement for a disillusioned young man. It was the beginning of a career at sea, briefly in merchant shipping, then in the navy.

The Royal Australian Navy (RAN) is both an institution and social structure, with its rigid rules and a complex organisational framework, "enlisted men can gain basic seamanship qualifications and then move on to specialist training in a trade know as a rate" (Australian War Memorial archives). George Stevens enlisted at 17½ years old and trained as a radio operator, the navy offered him order, a well defined system of what to do and how to do it, companionship and adventure. Within the naval sphere opportunities to travel, broaden knowledge and skills, develop respect and loyalty were offered. This became a positive collaboration between an institutionalised social structure and a private individual, showing how providing conditions to thrive, in return for hard work, loyalty and commitment created, at the time, a truly workable symbiotic relationship.

Political structure can play a major part in the lives of ordinary people. "The Menzies era" (Robert Menzies was prime minister from 1949 to 1966) internally provided a time of great political and social stability in Australia. This was the time span that the young George Stevens was gaining his navy skills, dating and marrying, then starting a family. Menzies was an ardent royalist, and even after the events of World War II, patriotism and national pride still rated highly with most white Australians. With the new Queen Elizabeth's coronation in 1953, fever for all things British was once again at a peak. George Stevens took part in the Coronation Contingent representing our military forces; he volunteered for the role and was offered a place in this commission, his patriotism matching the mood of the times.

The external political influence and manoeuvrings that involved Australia in The Korean War (1950–1953) was a defining factor in placing this country in the post-World War II world (ref) The RAN's involvement took George overseas once more on the HMAS *Sydney*. The *Sydney* with its Fleet Air Arm squadrons attacked enemy supply lines and supported allied forces from October 1951 to January 1952. Australia's involvement was seen as vital by the government of the time to help secure allies in the Asia pacific region, mainly the USA, and to show its binding commitment as a member of the new United Nations Organisation (ref). Australia had now entered the Cold War era.

George was there at this defining moment in Australian war time and political history.

Creating a stable environment for family life was extremely important to George, particularly since his own early experience of family life had not been happy. He realised early on that financial security was an important factor in this need for stability, so a reassessment of his naval options took place. The navy provided a wonderful life at the time for a young unattached male – however, with his marriage to Shirley in 1953 his perspective changed. The military way of life required frequent moving, which was hard on family members, George also had reached a point in the naval hierarchy where he could move no further, seniority took precedence over youth and talent. The synchronicity between valued recruit and institution had come to an end – it was time to move on.

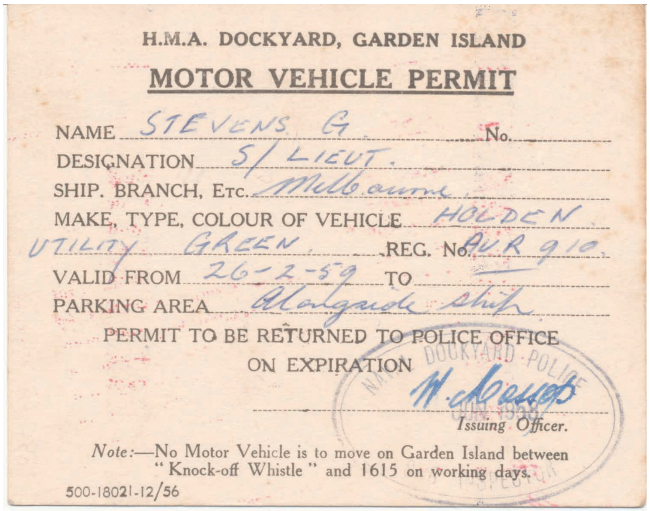
With the enormous amount of post-war reconstruction going on world-wide through the 1950s and the beginning of the new technology age in the 1960s, new types of employment and opportunities arose. Large international corporations looking to set up business in the Asia/ Pacific region saw Australia as the ideal platform to launch their expansion. Good staff with specialised skills and new ideas was sought and George was employed by IBM as a technician. The corporate structure at IBM allowed for talented individuals to rise through the ranks irrespective of age, rewarding George with a manager's role for his efforts. He had at last an interesting job with good pay to support his growing family (by now Shirley and George had two children). IBM required work relocation, so moving to Melbourne, Sydney and New Zealand occurred over the next few years. This issue of stable location for family life had not been completely resolved until the family finally bought a house and settled in Greenwich, Sydney. This provided a good base for work, the children's development and schooling, services and social life.

Work at IBM and family became the centre of George's life for the next 25 years, his work ethic, commitment to loyalty and obligation remaining strong. Disillusionment finally set in, however, in the-late 1980s when, "large-scale redundancy programs were in vogue with many large-sized firms (IBM included) saw these programs as solutions to their problems" (ref). This trend was not unique to IBM, as technology underwent enormous changes, many major institutions like banks, insurance companies and government departments experienced the brain drain that became a flood when "a variety of financial incentives were offered to encourage a growing proportion of the older workforce to retire or leave the labour market early" (ref). "As a direct consequence, new management theories and concepts, sometimes cynically referred to as management fads, regularly emerged and were frequently, and at times, desperately adopted by firms trying to gain a leading edge" (ref).This relentless pursuit of downsizing proved disastrous in the long term for many organisations as much experience and accumulated wisdom was lost from both the private and public domain. It was at this point that George Stevens decided to leave IBM – although he retained a consultant's position with the company for several years.

Early retirement can present its own set of problems for those who are unprepared, an undeniable factor being that "most people will have less income when they retire" (ref). For George financial security still remained a major priority, so he and Shirley bought and restored a number of homes in Greenwich in-

creasing their financial standing and equity thereby facilitating social mobility as well. The late 1980s saw the first of the massive housings booms in Sydney real estate facilitated by worldwide economic growth and share market increases, allowing many Sydneysiders like George, to benefit from house price rises. Subsequent moves both away from and back to Sydney have brought George and Shirley to their present home in Berowra where life's journey has come almost full circle, family commitment and affiliations being of upmost importance to this couple in later life.

George's life pattern can be seen to have been greatly influenced by the interaction between the personal triumphs and tragedies of his own private "biographical sphere and social setting" (ref) and the issues that effected the larger structures of public, political and historical domains. Despite the many challenges these interactions caused = George Stevens can "look back with a curious sense of astonishment that it has all turned out so well as a generation, they have had the closest thing imaginable to a dream run" (ref).



H.M.A. DOCKYARD, GARDEN ISLAND

MOTOR VEHICLE PERMIT

NAME STEVENS G. No.

DESIGNATION S/LIEUT.

SHIP. BRANCH, Etc. Melbourne

MAKE, TYPE, COLOUR OF VEHICLE HOLDEN UTILITY GREEN REG. No. PUR 910

VALID FROM 26-2-59 TO

PARKING AREA Alongside ship

PERMIT TO BE RETURNED TO POLICE OFFICE ON EXPIRATION

W. Clough

Issuing Officer.

Note:—No Motor Vehicle is to move on Garden Island between "Knock-off Whistle" and 1615 on working days.

500-18021-12/56

Appendix 3 – Transcript of recording made for grandson Robert, 1999

Robert, this is your Papa. Before you go any further with this tape, get a map of Australia and a map of the world because we will be referring to both. Okay, here we go. I am what is known as your paternal grandfather. That simply means that I am your father's father. You also have another grandfather, your maternal grandfather, and that of course is your mother's father. Now, I live in a place called Vincentia, on Jervis Bay, 200 kilometres south of Sydney. Can you find Sydney and Jervis Bay on the map? And your other grandfather lives a long way north: he lives at a place called Ubobo, near Gladstone in Queensland, and that is about 1200 kilometres north of Sydney. Now, I was born 70 years ago in Brisbane. Can you see Brisbane on the map between Sydney and Gladstone? I lived in Brisbane for about 8 years and then my family moved to Melbourne. Can you find Melbourne on the map? Here in Melbourne I lived for another 8 years until at the age of 16 I left school and joined the Merchant Navy. After about 18 months in the Merchant Navy doing a job of servicing the lighthouses around the Victorian coast, I joined the Royal Australian Navy. Here I trained in Adelaide – can you find Adelaide? – also in Sydney, also in Canberra – can you find Canberra on the map? Later on I was posted to a little ship called a Corvette. There were about 60 of these Corvettes built in Australia, and this one happened to have the name of *Gladstone*, the same name as the city near where your mother grew up.

Later on I joined the aircraft carrier HMAS *Sydney* to go to England for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth. We sailed north from Sydney to Brisbane and then around Cape York and then headed west towards India. We went around India and stopped at Aden. Can you find Aden on the map of the world? We then proceeded along the Red Sea and through the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean Sea. Here we stopped at a place called Tobruk, very famous during the last war, in North Africa. We made another stop at the island of Malta and another stop at Gibraltar. Can you find Gibraltar, which is on the tip of Spain near the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea? And then we stopped at Portsmouth in England. We stayed in England for about 6 weeks, during which I marched through London with thousands of other servicemen from many Commonwealth countries for the occasion of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth. We then boarded HMAS *Sydney* again – the aircraft carrier – and continued to head west, and stopped at Nova Scotia: Halifax, Nova Scotia. Can you find it? Then at Baltimore, Maryland, part of the United States of America. Then we made a short stop at Kingston, Jamaica. Through the Panama Canal. Still heading west, we stopped at Honolulu in the Hawaiian Islands. Can you see the Hawaiian Islands? We then headed for New Zealand, making a brief stop at Auckland, and then we returned to Sydney. There are many other stories I could tell you. For example, after returning to Sydney for a short while, we then headed north to the Philippines to Japan and Korea, but there is not enough time on this tape to tell you. I'll tell you later.

Have a good day, mate. Bye-bye.

Appendix 4 – Vignettes from George's life

Several vignettes from George's life that George didn't mention are included here for completeness. Some may be apocryphal.

1930s: Cecily's remedy for a sore throat or a cold was three drops of kerosene on a spoonful of sugar. The taste was disgusting.

1930s: One day little George was upset about something and threatened to leave home. So his mother handed him his bag and his father held the front door open in invitation. George backed down.

1947: As a young man training at HMAS *Watson* and a champion swimmer, George decided to swim across Sydney Harbour. So he and three friends set off from Bradleys Head (near Taronga Zoo) and while one rowed a dinghy, the other three swam to Rose Bay through the ships, ferries and sharks.

1949: While training at Culcheth in England, George and a few mates went for a drive somewhere. The car had a dicky seat, which folded out from within the boot to provide extra seating, in which George rode. The driver lost control and the car ran off the road into a ditch, throwing the occupants out. Nothing was broken.

1952: While serving on the HMAS *Sydney* in Korea, George was badly injured. As he says in his *Australians At War* interview: "On one particular occasion early in the morning the observer signalled me as having a problem with one of his pieces of equipment. I hopped up onto the main plane stub, because he opened the canopy, looked inside, decided what the problem was and I forget what it was at the moment, but we fixed it there and then. I turned around to get off the aircraft and slipped on the . . . icy metal of the aircraft and fell onto the flight deck and landed on my backside. And years later that has been the source of a problem which has resulted in a partial disability pension that I get from Veterans' Affairs." What he didn't explain was that he was laid up in the sick bay for 2 weeks, held in traction until his spine mended. The problem was eventually identified as spondylosis. He spent the rest of his life in constant back pain.

1953: Coming back from the Queen's Coronation, the HMAS *Sydney* passed through the Panama Canal and headed west towards Hawai'i. During an afternoon off, George and a couple of mates were lying in deckchairs on deck, enjoying the sunshine. Looking up into the sky, George saw what looked like a white golf ball sitting way above the ship. He drew his mates' attention to it and they watched it for a couple of minutes. Suddenly, it shot off towards the horizon at an impossible speed. A few minutes later, it was suddenly sitting above the ship again. Then a few minutes later, it again shot off, this time for good.

1953: In Hong Kong, George took a black-and-white photograph of Shirley to a man who painted portraits. The man was deaf, so perhaps he had an interpreter. The man painted a portrait of Shirley on silk (opposite). He asked George what colour Shirley's eyes were. "Um, brown?" Shirley had blue eyes. Back home, George's father, Fred, decided to fix it, and pulled out his watercolour paints. The blue paint immediately ran into the silk and spoiled the painting. It took several decades to fade.

1960: George's son, Matthew, was born while George was on tour. Returning from Japan, George was in the Philippines when he received the telegram. Delighted, he told everyone, including a model maker, who declared that a boy should have a ship, and gave George a model

of a two-masted schooner called the *Makassar*. Matthew still has it.

1961: From the age of 16, when he joined the merchant navy, George had smoked heavily. It's likely that this habit, aided and abetted later by the RAN's practice of issuing cigarettes, contributed to the illnesses that led to his death. He was still smoking when Matthew was born. One day, Shirley was unpicking chicken feed bags, which in those days were made of striped calico, to make clothes for Matthew on account of having no money, and George announced that he was off to the shops to buy cigarettes. Shirley threw a fit: "I'm unpicking chook food



The hand-painted silk portrait from Hong Kong.



bags to make clothes for the baby and you're wasting money on cigarettes!" There and then he quit, and he never touched them again.

1967: George and Shirley took the family to Tasmania to visit Shirley's brother Bob and his bride, Karen, in Tarraleah, central Tasmania. They visited the Port Arthur penal settlement, which wasn't yet a significant tourist attraction . . . or particularly well protected. George souvenired a handmade brick from one of the prison buildings. The brick languished for years afterwards, wrapped in newspaper. It eventually disappeared, perhaps thrown away.

1972: George became involved in the Australian contribution to the Gurkha Welfare Trust, established in 1969 in the UK to support old Gurkha soldiers in their retirement. At a fundraising event held in the Melbourne Arts Centre, he met Lord Robert Casey, then Governor-General, and acquired a genuine kukri, which is still in the family.

1974: After a year in New Zealand with IBM, George treated the family to a holiday, first in Sydney, then in

New Caledonia, in September of 1974. The family joined a lunch tour to Île Amédée, south of Nouméa, where George discovered how much he liked French wines. The one and only time anyone ever saw him drunk, he first started picking up venomous sea snakes on a stick to inspect them. Then, on returning to Nouméa, he climbed up to the gunwale to disembark, bade everyone "Bon soir, mes amis!", and fell backwards into the boat onto his head. It was never spoken of.

1980s: One evening, after dark, a knock at the front door in Greenwich revealed two Australian Federal Police, who had come to ask why George hadn't lodged his tax returns for a few years. This came as news to George, who later learned that his accountant had been fiddling the books.

1980s: Early one morning while driving to Sydney Airport to catch a plane somewhere for IBM business, George found himself unintentionally caught up in a police motorcade, along with four or five other cars, as the police escorted the King of Sweden through unbroken green lights all the way from the city to the Airport. Definitely the way to travel.

1980s: On returning from a trip for IBM to the USA, George was asked at Customs and Immigration whether he had anything to declare. "No, nothing. But there's a gun in there." The inspectors' eyes went wide and they asked to see it. George withdrew a flint gas lighter shaped like a pistol. The officers were relieved and let him go through.

Appendix 5 – Australians At War interviews

In 2003, The Australian Government's Department of Veterans' Affairs selected 2000 ex-servicemen and -women to be interviewed about their lifetime experiences. The interviews were conducted by Australians At War Film Archives and recorded on DVD, both voice and video. The purpose was to record for posterity first-hand historic information from people still living, for future use by historians, teachers, film makers and social scientist types.

All participants were given a copy of their own DVDs. In my case it was about 7 hours of recording on four DVDs.

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Australians At War Film Archive

Transcript of Interview

George Stevens

Archive number: 789

Date interviewed: 1 October 2003

George, could you give us a brief summary of your life to date?

Well I was born 1929, February 1929 in a little, at the time, suburb of Brisbane, called Wooloowin. Wooloowin is only really a few kilometres from the city and as I grew up there in the first few years I thought that the city of Brisbane which I can see on the horizon, was miles away, but it wasn't. I lived in Brisbane in three locations, Wooloowin, Windsor and Shorncliffe until I was about eight. Dad got a change of job and we moved to Melbourne. I went to school in Melbourne in the primary school, Lloyd Street Central School and then subsequently into Melbourne Boys' High School. This was during the war years and I was bitten like most young men, with the need to be part of the war, and at the age of 16 I left school and went to sea in the Merchant Navy. When I was old enough, I was 17 and a half years I joined the Royal Australian Navy as a radar technician, trainee. I spent the next almost 15 years in the navy. I then resigned my commission. I became an officer. I resigned my commission for reasons that perhaps I will talk about later, and I went into the hard cold world of civilian life. I started in desperation because I had a family to support, selling socks in David Jones. I then graduated from that after a few weeks to Channel 9, on the outside broadcast unit. From there I joined a little known company at the time that manufactured big accounting machines, time clocks and mechanical typewriters. That company was IBM [International Business Machines], and I stayed with IBM for 25 years. I, tongue in cheek, say that I had 25 years of undiscovered crime in IBM and I resigned, or retired actually, at the age of 57 in 1986, and in the years since then I have done all sorts of interesting things. I suddenly discovered that there was a world outside of the cloistered life of IBM. I had a marvellous time, but I have to admit it was difficult for the first four or five years adjusting to the lifestyle.

Well thank you for the summary, that's good and concise and also gives us some highlights that we can be aware of as we go through.

OK.

Now just returning to the beginning, once again if I can have you tell us when and where you were born and maybe if you'd like to give us a few more details about the suburb in which you were born.

Yes, OK, I was born in Wooloowin which is a suburb of Brisbane, close suburb but at the time the family owned a house in Windsor, which is a neighbouring suburb, so my early memories are of the house in Windsor. At the age of four and a half I went to the Windsor State School, and this was in the Depression days, people had no money, and I mean no money. I can recall my mother telling me in later years that she used to put me in the pram and my brother who was almost five years old, he would walk along side the pram, and she would wheel the pram from Wooloowin to the Valley, Fortitude Valley in Brisbane which probably is about 3 miles away, to do the shopping because shopping there was a little bit cheaper. Besides which she saved thruppence fare for herself, both ways, so that was sixpence, and a penny for my brother, so she saved eightpence by doing that. People these days just can't understand how tough things must have been for those unfortunate parents in those Depression days. I stayed at the Windsor school for perhaps two years and then the family moved to Wooloowin; we were only there a short time. Dad at that time had been a radio engineer at 4BC Brisbane but he had a bug for flying so he worked additional hours to earn the money to learn to be a pilot and he was given the job because he got his pilot's licence. He was also a skilled radio operator and because of his merchant navy service in World War I, he was a skilled navigator. So he got a job with Qantas, as one of the early pilots. In those days, this is in 1934, '35, '36, they used to fly De Havilland 86, a four engine aircraft carrying eight passengers from Brisbane to Singapore and they had something like 21 stops en route and it took them a whole week to get there. They had a week in Singapore where they met up with the Empire Flying Boat service from Britain, and the mail was exchanged and then they flew back again, another week. So he was away 3 weeks at a time. At that stage we had moved to Shorncliffe which is on Moreton Bay and I have to say that was the happiest time of my life. We lived there for two years and it was happy because it was beside the seaside. These days you look at Moreton Bay and you compare Moreton Bay with Jervis Bay where I had been living recently and there is no comparison. Moreton Bay is grubby and muddy and dirty and so on, but to me that was life, it was absolutely wonderful.

What made you particularly happy to be part of that environment as a child?

I guess a couple of things, one, it was a village atmosphere. The school that I went to at Shorncliffe, there were two rooms in the school and these two rooms had two teachers and they catered for everyone from Infants through to the sixth grade. Probably the total school population would have been 20, 22, something like that. So it was a small village atmosphere. And secondly, it was as I said, by the sea. That was marvellous. I learnt to swim there and at the age of eight I qualified, I have a certificate which I still have, saying that I swam 100 yards continuous by the same stroke.

Was this beach swimming or was there a swimming enclosure there?

Beach swimming, but also in qualifying for this it was a swimming pool at Sandgate. Now this swimming pool was constructed of suspended concrete with a pipe running out into Moreton Bay. The shelf of the seawater was very, very shallow. You could walk out perhaps 200, 300 metres and still be up to your waist, so the salt water was pumped into the suspended concrete pool, huge pool, 33 yards long, so to do the hundred yard swim I had to do three lengths of it. So yes, that was it, that pool

of course has long since gone. At the time also that we left, they were in the process of building a shark net enclosure at Shorncliffe. When I went back many years later to see this shark net enclosure it had been pulled down. It had deteriorated so much, so I never got to swim in that shark net enclosure.

It sounds as if as a child you did spend a lot of time on the beach?

Oh yes, every day, because to get to school I could go directly by the streets, or I could go indirectly, the long way round by the beach and of course I went by the beach everyday.

Were you a keen bodysurfer as well?

No, I didn't like surfing because I was brought up in the environment where there was no such thing as surf. I mean Brisbane is not far from Surfers Paradise but to get to Surfers Paradise you had to be rich. You had to have a car and I think in Shorncliffe I can remember one car being owned by the local shop owner, Mr Thompson. So surfing was like going across to the United States or England, it was impossible.

I believe you have memories of such things as the horse drawn baker's cart?

Oh yes, this happened when we went to Melbourne. I was fascinated; the very first day we were there, this is in East Malvern where we rented a house. We were approached, very politely, by three different manufactures of bread, bakers, and two dispensers of milk, milk carters. The bakers introduced themselves, the deliverymen introduced themselves, gave us samples of bread and recommended that we used their bakery. Similarly with the milk deliveries, we were given samples of milk and cream, little half pint bottle of milk and a little something or other of cream with firm recommendations that we should go to Kilpatrick's dairy for our milk. Of course when the war came a few years later that sort of thing was stopped entirely.

That seems to have been a much more personalised sort of world?

Oh, very civilised, very personalised and civilised. And the garbage man, I remember the garbage man, two-wheeled dray, or I guess that's what you'd call it, drawn by a horse and the horse would plod along at a steady pace and the garbo would come and pick up the garbage and empty it into the dray as the horse went past. And the horse always knew when to stop, always new when to turn left, or turn right, very civilised.

Absolutely, absolutely, sounds like another world altogether.

It is.

Now you mentioned the Depression. What do you either remember of the Depression, or what do you remember people telling about the Depression and its impact?

Oh, a number of things I guess. One, the need to save all the food scraps to feed to the chooks, so the chooks would lay eggs that were edible so you didn't have to buy eggs. The need to grow your own vegetables so you didn't have to go and buy vegetables. The need to conserve the clothes and to remake the clothes. This was particularly useful in those families who had three or four children, hence the expression the "hand-me-downs". The fact that for entertainment it was all family type entertainment. To go to the theatre was really a night out, where you paid thruppence to sit on the hard seats, or you paid sixpence to sit in the canvas seats.

What sort of theatre were you seeing?

American made films of course, Charlie Chaplin was very popular ,and new stage and theatre screens like William Powell and Myrna Loy, names that people these days wouldn't know at all, but in those days they were very popular film people.

That's right, they were very popular in the Thin Man series?

Yes, yes, oh, you are showing your age, or you've read history?

I'm just a film buff. Do you have any memories of silent films? You referred to Chaplin, were the Chaplin films you were seeing silent?

No, all the films we saw that I can recall seeing were sound films although you mentioned this, my wife Shirley, her father used to play the piano. He was a brilliant pianist, he could play anything, and his first job after he came back from the First World War was to play the piano for the silent theatres and he was doing this in Dubbo, where Shirley was born. And she used to sleep underneath his piano at night, while her mother was there looking after her and he was playing the piano. So no, that's my only association with the silent movies.

And I expect that you went along to children's matinees?

Yes, I remember one particular incident where I was given sufficient money to go by tram to the neighbouring suburb with my older brother and a friend of his. And as the tram approached the stop these big adult boys who must have been at least nine or ten at the time, got onto the running board of the tram and hopped off while the tram was still going. So of course me, five or six years old, had to do the same sort of thing. And I can remember this man grabbing me and holding me back and I was so incensed at this fellow stopping me getting off the tram. Just as well he did or I might have ended up with a broken neck.

And you are on your way to a children's matinee on that day?

On the way to a children's matinee, yes.

Just moving back to Queensland and this brings to mind your parents. What can you tell me about your parents and their backgrounds?

Okay, Mum was born in Melbourne to a middle class family. Her father was a senior officer with the Victorian Government at that time. The Victorian Government had a soldier settlement scheme, in fact a soldier settlement scheme for the First World War that was in operation. My grandfather, her father, was responsible for the administration of that in the State of Victoria, so it was a sort of a middle class family. Snobs, really. Cecily went to a private school, because they could afford that and she did the sort of things that young women do at private schools, learnt to play tennis, very physical, active, very aggressive women, learnt to play tennis, played it well, and ended up in later years as one of the Queensland women champion singles players. So that was her background.

Cecily being your mother?

Cecily being my mother, yes.

Now you mentioned your father and his career and his career involvement from radio through to aviation. Can you give us a bit of a character description of your father?

Aloof, remote, deeply concentrated. If he wanted to

do something he would focus on it to the exclusion of all outside interference. He wanted to become a radio operator. This is back in 1916 when he was still living in the lighthouses with his father. So, by correspondence he learnt to become a radio operator. H knew the Morse code because of the signalling, the light signalling that they used to do between the lighthouses and the ships. In later years he wanted to be a pilot so he learnt to become a pilot. He wanted to know how to navigate, he wanted to know how to navigate by the stars, celestial navigation so he did that. He was, as I say, a very intensely focused, remote sort of a man. Never knew him ever to put his arm around me and say, "G'day mate" or anything like that.

So what was his involvement in radio in Brisbane?

Well, because when he went to sea in a merchant ship in World War I, it was a troop carrier, travelling between Australia and England. He became very interested in wireless and became a very competent wireless operator, was seconded by the navy out of the merchant service into the navy, given a commission as a commissioned telegraphist, sent to the island of Samarai, which is off the southeast coast of Papua New Guinea. He was there and received the message from, the transmitted message from England of the Armistice and then re-transmitted that back to Australia.

So to connect this with what he was doing with radio in the radio industry in Brisbane, are we talking about a broadcasting station are we?

Yes, talking about a broadcasting station because of his interest in radio. He was not only interested in the communication aspect but he was also interested in the technical aspect and in those days, of course, the radio transmitters were pretty primitive. They did have thermionic valves but they were very primitive, so it wasn't really too difficult for him to grasp the technical fundamentals to become competent in the design and maintenance of transmitters and receivers and that got him a job after the First World War with 4BC. He then went to Melbourne and worked in the same capacity with 3LO and then back to Brisbane and 4QG. And it was that, coupled with his knowledge of navigation and his desire to fly that got him, collectively those things, the job with Qantas Airways.

You mentioned, and you were talking about before we started recording his involvement and his father's involvement in lighthouses. Can you just tell us a bit about that?

Yes, my great grandfather, William Stevens, migrated to Australia in 1856. He had spent time in the Royal Navy, something like about eight years in the Royal Navy. Now family lore had it that he had been wounded in a battle somewhere. We have no evidence of this but by piecing together bits of information and history it seems that he might have been involved in the Crimean War which was 1853, '54. It is a fact that he had a wound that affected his leg. He was a very keen cricketer and whenever he played cricket he had another member of the team run for him when he hit the ball. So he came to Australia in 1856 and because of his naval background he very quickly scored a job as a lighthouse keeper on the Victorian lights. He stayed in the job as a lighthouse keeper on the Victorian lights until something like about 1897. His son, my grandfather, George Frederick Williams Stevens followed suit and he stayed with the lighthouses right through until almost the day he died in 1946. He retired in 1933 but then did relief lighthouse keeping duties for lighthouse keepers who were going on

long service leave. Dad was born and brought up in the lighthouses and spent the first 16 years of his life living the life of Riley, it really was. The only education he had was what was passed onto him by his mother or his father. Fishing, going out hunting for foxes or rabbits, with a rifle, that was his life. Until at the age of 16 his father said, "Right, I've had enough. You go out and support yourself. I've got you job as a telegraph messenger boy in Mornington." And that's how he left home. And interestingly in later years he told me he never really went back home. He visited frequently but because of his interest and association with all his activities he never returned home to live.

He sounds a truly remarkable man. Such a wide range of interests, and what a fascinating life.

One, many fascinating facts, and one of them is I have a photograph of him standing on top of the tower of the radio mast of one of the Brisbane radio stations 4QG or 4BC, either one. And you can imagine the huge steel tower with the bar across the top and the wires running off and there's the photo of Dad standing on the top of this. Absolutely no fear of heights, and that must have been of interest and value to him as a pilot I guess.

And being up to great altitudes on lighthouses was probably a good conditioning too.

It possibly was to, but after he left Qantas he was offered the job in the Department of Civil Aviation in Melbourne and that's when we left Brisbane to live in Melbourne. The war came along and he went into the air force as a communications officer and after the war he went back into the Department of Civil Aviation where he stayed until he retired. In the early part of the war, before he went into the air force he was asked by Lester Brain of Qantas fame and PG Taylor to go with them to San Diego to pick up one of the Catalinas. A number of Catalinas were built in San Diego and the Australian ones were flown back to Australia by Australian crews and he was the crew of one of the first Cats to come back. At the time they held the record for the longest airborne flight, 25 hours it took them to fly from Suva to Sydney.

That was a big deal at the time wasn't it?

Oh, absolutely yes.

I think PG Taylor wrote about it later didn't he?

He did, yes.

In a book called Frigate?

Yes.

Tell us a bit about your mother's personality. You said she was very able at sports

but you also used the word "aggressive".

I don't think that I have met a more assertive, aggressive person in my life. There were two ways of doing something, Cecily's way and the wrong way. She made more enemies than friends and yet she had remarkable abilities. In her later life she developed an interest in flowers, in particular the species Lilium, and she in fact had bred and registered two hybrids of the *Lilium*, one is called 'Anzac Glory'. She made a number of associations and friends in this capacity and in every case, after a very short space of time the personal relationship between Cecily and this person would deteriorate to the point where they parted company. My brother Dick married a second time in later life, a lovely woman, in Griffith. Dick brought Cecily to live in Griffith with him, not in the same house but in a retirement village, and the very first day he brought Cecily around to visit Dawn, his new wife. Cecily walked in the door, looked around and she said, "I don't like this,

you'd have to change that." An astonishing woman.

Did they change it?

No, Dawn, who was severely affected with poliomyelitis, and as a paraplegic just couldn't comprehend and couldn't cope with this.

I am trying to imagine Cecily in a lighthouse or in a lighthouse keeper's cottage.

No, Cecily was never in the lighthouses. Father had left the lighthouses at the age of 16. He was in 3LO Melbourne as a radio engineer when he met Cecily.

Oh, I see. So if we are to look at the formative influences on you who do you think was more influential in making you the character that you are?

Both my parents in their own ways were influential in as much as I reacted adversely to both of them. I am what I am largely because I disapproved of what they were. As I said, Cecily was very aggressive, couldn't relate with people and that used to worry me, "What's wrong, why is this women so angry. Why is she so offensive with this other person?" I thought that was unnecessary.

I mean it seems to me that you had your own strong sense of right and wrong and your own determination to create yourself.

Yes, yes, yes. I tell you one little incident about my father, as I said to you, he was remote. You might find this hard to believe but he was a cigarette smoker and I can recall as a small boy when we were living in Shorncliffe. I don't know how it came about, but my brother Dick was standing there, and Dad was standing there smoking and either one of them said that Dad could blow smoke from his eyes. I knew he could blow smoke from his mouth and his nose but he could blow smoke from his eyes. I said, "I don't believe this" and Dad said, "Yeah, I'll show you. Give me your hand," so he took my hand and he said, "Now, you look closely at my eyes," and I stand closely at his eyes and he gradually moved his cigarette towards my hand until it burnt me. Can you believe that. He thought it was funny, Dick thought it was funny. I thought it was painful. Interesting man.

You must have had a role model, some kind of sense of, or a person to provide you with some sense of right and wrong in life?

Possibly, it certainly wasn't my maternal grandfather. The fellow who was in the Victorian Government. And it certainly wasn't his wife, my grandmother, she had Alzheimer's. It certainly wasn't my father's parents; they were living in Port Lonsdale in retirement at the time, he was supplementing his meagre lighthouse pension by growing vegetables and catching rabbits for food and pelts. Possibly it was the high school. I remember my first week at Melbourne Boys' High School and it's at Forest Hill, South Yarra with a big playing field and a big building in the background. I saw these superhero athletes, they must have been at least 15 or 16, the big boys, the seniors and they were doing track and field events. Running, sprinting, hurdling, throwing the javelin, and I thought, "This is what I am here for. This is life." For the next two years I was a part of that life, I felt that I had arrived. But then as I entered the fifth year of high school, in the very early days of 1945, Mum had taken off with a digger who had returned from the Middle East, met him in hospital. Dad was in New Guinea, my brother Dick had joined the army. He was in the 2/6 Commando Unit somewhere behind the Japanese lines in New Guinea. Grandma had Alzheimer's, Grandpa had his hands full and there was me, by myself, and my school. And I

thought, "I've got to get out of this." So through family connections I met up with Captain John King who was the Director of Navigation for Victoria at the time. He got me a job as a deck boy on the lighthouse supply ship *Cape York*, and that's where I spent the next 15 months of my life, and that was high adventure, high adventure for a 16-year-old kid.

Just before we move onto that and that sounds very tantalising to go straight into that story. But what was it about your schooling and your other formative influences that made you able to be sufficiently independently minded away from the influence of your parents?

I don't know, probably something innate in me, maybe it was a section of that characteristic like I explained about Cecily. There are two ways that you do anything, her way and

the wrong way, and maybe that was it. I felt that what I was seeing in my family was the wrong way and I was going to do things my way. I don't know, I can't answer that. I'm not a psychiatrist or a psychologist.

I just, because it sounds as if you were really up against the odds there and I think that it is a very admirable thing that you have managed to pull free of it and become the person you are basically.

Well, looking back on it, yes, it was tough. There are times when I wondered which way was up but then I look at other people, and I read about them and I think I don't have problems compared with them.

Just getting back to World War II or getting back even further to World War I, did people that you knew talk about World War I?

Very, very little Shirley's father who I knew quite well for a number of years before he died was an artillery man in the 27th Field Artillery Brigade in the Somme Valley for almost all of, well, from the end of 1917 right through until well after the Armistice. He would not ever talk about World War I. Dad was a wireless operator on a troop ship. Occasionally he would tell a little bit of a story like once when they were returning home they had just passed through the Red Sea into the Indian Ocean and they were approached by a German raider, but because the ship they were on, the *Wiltshire*, had been built for the meat trade, a refrigeration ship, she was fast and she was empty returning home She was able to outpace the raider. That was just one little story he told me, but other than that, no.

I imagine World War II made much more of an impact on your life?

Oh yes, yes.

Do you remember where you were when you heard that World War II had broken out?

Yes, we were living in number 5 Forster Avenue, East Malvern, and I couldn't work out what all the shouting was about. The newspaper boy outside and all the neighbours out. "War is Declared," didn't mean a thing to me at the time. In a few years later I was part of it.

Now I gather you have memories of Americans being everywhere during World War II. What specific memories do you have of the American, so-called invasion of Australia?

A number of things, travelling by electric train from Caulfield into Melbourne, passing the Melbourne Cricket Ground where the Americans were billeted and every time we went past on the train, even though it was

perhaps three or four hundred metres away you would wave and you would always get a wave back. To us, the loudmouth swaggering behaviour of the American servicemen in the streets of Melbourne. The obvious tension between the Australian servicemen and the American servicemen when in uniform. The obvious affection that the young women would show for the American servicemen because of the fact that they had money, but more importantly, they were prepared to spend it. They were prepared to buy the girls a drink or a dress. Those sort of memories, observations, superficial perhaps but indicative of the relationship, the difficult relationship that existed between the Australian armed forces and the American armed forces at the time.

I believe there were open fights between American and Australian soldiers?

Oh yes, in fact there has been a book written about the Battle of Brisbane. You may have read it.

No I haven't actually, that sounds very interesting. I have heard of the Battle of Brisbane. Did you ever witness any open animosity?

Not that I can recall because being mainly, or being exclusively a schoolboy visiting the big city of Melbourne on rare occasions. No, I wouldn't have seen it. And of course those servicemen would not be seen in the suburbs, so no, I didn't see it.

How strongly did you feel about whether these American servicemen had the right, or didn't have the right to be swaggering and particularly paying attention to Australian women?

Oh, I was highly incensed and we are important people in our own right and who are these invaders to come and show us and tell us what to do. Fiercely loyal. What's Germaine Greer's word, "chauvinistic"? The true meaning of chauvinism; fiercely loyal. That's how I felt, regardless of the circumstances that created it.

Did other people that you knew express an opinion of the Americans in Australia?

Yes, and most of them would tend to agree with what was my opinion, which in fact of course was influenced by the older people. But most Australians, ordinary suburban people that I came in contact with had a similar opinion. We need them here to help protect Australia, but I wished to God that they would go home.

So, in a sense they were seen as a bit of a necessary evil.

Yes, very much so.

Now you mentioned that your mother went off with another man. Can you tell us a bit about what happened there?

Well, as I said, Dad was in the air force in New Guinea away from home. I suspect that the marriage breakdown had started a lot earlier because of his continued absences from home. First of all when he was flying for Qantas, then when he was in the Department of Civil Aviation, he had responsibilities for communication networks within civil aviation right around Australia. So he was frequently away from home. He was, as I said, a remote sort of a man. I can't imagine why any women would want to marry him. So, the marriage breakdown probably occurred a lot earlier. Mum also, despite the fact that she was a very aggressive woman was quite gregarious in her tennis playing. She belonged to a number of clubs and there were always parties. They were incompatible. So the ground was set and I think she was consciously or subconsciously looking for a soul mate and she found this

fellow in hospital, David, he had been in the Middle East. I don't think he was wounded but he had suffered malaria of the bowel because of the living conditions there, the flies and the sand. And he was hospitalised home and somehow she met him at the hospital and they got together thereafter.

How was it that she came to meet him in hospital?

She had a friend, neighbour, living by who was very active in visiting hospitals, bringing cheer, and flowers and chocolates to the wounded Diggers and she took Cecily along one day and it just happened that they met David that day and they clicked.

Did the fact that your mother formed an association, and obviously went off to spend some time with David. Did that have an impact on you?

Oh yes, yes. That was one of the main reasons why I quit home. I couldn't reconcile the fact of her abdicating her responsibilities to the marriage vows. I am a person who believes that we make a commitment to do something, then regardless, you do it. Our marriage for example as of the 16th of this month would have lasted 50 years, coming up for our golden wedding. I believe that if I have an agreement with you to do something, then I will honour that agreement, and the marriage vows is one of those. I disapprove of the proliferation, the propensity of young people these days, to enter into then breakaway from their marriage responsibilities because of the affect it has on children. It had a very profound affect on me, adverse affect. But I have overcome that now. But I can see it. I saw it in a child this week. A friend of one of my grandsons. The father decided that he didn't want to live with the wife and three children so he's gone off to America. She's got to support the children by going to work in a real estate agent. I can see that this is having an adverse affect on that child. I'm rambling I know, I don't know if I am answering your question?

Well, no this is you expressing your point of view which is part of the interview and that's entirely valid and entirely appropriate to what we are doing, so that's fine.

So I have never really forgiven her for that. No marriage and I mean no marriage is perfect. There is always instances where

one party will criticise the other validly or maybe not validly but that is a minor thing in the overall picture. The overall picture is a stable family. You see, if you have a stable family and that stable family is repeated throughout the whole nation, you have a stable nation. You have a strong and powerful nation.

Can you be more specific about how your parents marriage break-up affected you?

I just didn't want to live at home. I didn't want to have my friends know about the marriage break-up. I didn't want to be associated with them. When my father died it was just like the old bloke down the road died. "Oh yeah, so he's died." And when my mother died my brother Dick rang up and I said, "So be it." I lost all affection for both of them.

As a result of the marriage break-up?

As a result of the marriage break-up, yeah. And I vowed and declared that that would never happen in my family. We are a strong family. Our son Matthew married to Linda, two lovely little boys. Daughter Jenny, married to John, two lovely little boys. Jenny lives just around the corner here in Berowra Heights, Matthew lives in Thornleigh. We are a strong, close-knit family and we are going to stay that way.

Just getting back to other memories that you might have had of that World War II period. What were some of the other outward and visible forms of World War II that you noticed and remembered to this day?

I guess because my brother Dick was in the army, wherever possible, I tried to keep knowledgeable of what the army was up to and what it was doing. Whether it was in the Middle East, whether it was in New Guinea, whether it was in Borneo. And wherever I would see a solider in uniform I'd feel proud. I am part of that thing, whatever that thing is. Not so much the navy surprisingly, because I ended up in the navy. And not so much because of the air force because Dad was in the air force. Maybe it was because of my feelings for Dad that I tended to regard the air force as another thing. So I guess my prime interest was in the army, because of my brother Dick. He was to me a superhero. Physically, he was a very big man, well over six feet, broad, strong, commanding appearance, compared with me, a little fellow. So going back to one of your earlier questions, maybe Dick's influence had something to do with the way I am. And again I haven't answered your question.

I'm just wondering, we will get back to Dick in a moment. Were there as such any outward forms of the affect of World War II, such as austerity that you noticed?

Oh, yes, yes, we had rationing, we had petrol rationing. I remember seeing cars with the gas producer device, a mechanical device about as big as a medium sized gas cylinder, liquid petroleum gas cylinder mounted on the rear bumper bar, burning coke to produce gas to fire the engine in the car. Some of them with big inflatable bags on the roof of the car to hold the gas. The food and clothes rationing books where if you wanted a pound of butter you had to have so many coupons cut out of the book with the scissors by the grocer. If you wanted wool or cotton clothes so many coupons were cut, and of course the black market that operated.

How much were you aware of the black market?

Superficially, but I was aware of it when a friend visited Cecily and gave her a counterfeit book.

Are we talking about a counterfeit ration book?

A counterfeit ration book, yes. Now how common that was I don't know. But it existed.

Did Cecily go on to use that counterfeit ration book?

I imagine she did, I don't know.

How did you know it was counterfeit?

She told me.

Cecily told you it was counterfeit?

Yeah, yeah.

And she had no problems about using it?

No problems whatsoever. Her rationale was, "Everyone else is doing it so why shouldn't I?" No principles about it.

You mentioned the fact that you felt very patriotic. Other people that we have interviewed have spoken of their love of, and their loyalty for the Empire. How much did the Empire play, a British Empire play a role in your life?

Interesting question that because in those days I fervently believed there were two classes of people in the world, the British and those who wished they were. A bit of tongue in cheek there. Nowadays in our family we are polarised, Shirley is a fierce monarchist and I'm a fierce republican.

Looking back in the context of the 1930s and 1940s it seems to me you were very proudly Australian, but where did the British Empire come into all this?

Oh, we were part of the British Empire. We were as much part of the British Empire as we were a part of Australia. We were Australians but we were British. And that included other dominions like South Africa, New Zealand, India.

Just returning to your brother. He seems to have been very much a role model for you?

Yes.

And he was your older brother, he was almost five years older than you.

I was told later in life that I was a result of a reconciliation after a fight between my mother and father.

Did you have any other brothers and sisters?

No. Father married again and I do have living in Brisbane a half brother. We communicate spasmodically, we are good friends but there is no personal relationships there at all.

At what stage in your life did you find out that you were a result of a reconciliation.

When my father's second wife told me one day. And you can imagine how that made me feel.

How did that make you feel?

Bloody awful. I am a result of an accident. She didn't have to tell me, why did she have to tell me? But she did.

It sounds like Dick was almost a parental figure as well as a role model for you?

Yes, and this happened in later life too. Before he died he was very much wanting to continue an association with me. He lived in Griffith. At the time we lived in Greenwich, a suburb of Sydney here. We would have frequent communication, every couple of weeks, phone-call, letter, that sort of thing.

You mentioned that he was enlisted in the army. And yet you ended up doing maritime things. Why was this?

Partly because of the ancestral influence, the lighthouses. But partly because it was an easy escape route from home. Here was this job being offered where I could get away from home immediately, like in the next couple of days.

Could we talk through, and you may have covered a little of this before, but if we could revisit how it was you were offered this job, and just talk us through the process of you getting involved and what the job actually was?

Yes, I mentioned before that the man that brought this about was Captain John King, who was the Director of Navigation in Victoria and he was a personal friend of my grandfather, George Frederick William, who was the lighthouse keeper, and also known to my Dad. It was through Dad giving me a contact with John King, that I went in to visit him in his office in Melbourne, on spec. And told him that I wanted to go to sea. And he said, "Well it just so happens that we have a vacancy on the lighthouse supply ship *Cape York*, for a deck boy." There were three lighthouse supply ships servicing the whole of Australia, and *Cape York* had the responsibility for the Victorian lights, South Australian lights and the Tasmanian lights. These are the lights that are difficult to access. Off-shore islands and otherwise almost impossible to access by land.

Now the answer maybe obvious but can you tell me the duties of a lighthouse supply ship actually are?

Yeah. The light in the lighthouse was driven by kerosene, had done so for many years, and it was important that those lights had supplies of kerosene. Some of them also were driven by an acetylene gas, so the lighthouse supply ship had to carry 24 gallon drums, not 44 gallon drums because they were too heavy for us to handle, 24 gallon drums of kerosene, and cylinders, I don't know what the cylinders weighed, maybe 40 or 50 kilograms of acetylene gas, so they were the prime requirements. They also had to carry petrol in drums, to drive the generators to create the electricity for use. They also had to carry food for the occupants and food for the livestock because in some of these attended lights they might have communication once a fortnight by fishing boat that would bring mail, otherwise all the supplies for the operation of the light and the families, and typically they'd be three families, three lightkeepers, all had to come via the lighthouse supply ship. And we would visit a light on average once every, about 3 months I suppose.

Now presumably there was a period of training before, or was it training on the job?

Training on the job.

So somehow by me asking you for a definition of the role of the supply ship we have leapt right into the story, but could you give us a bit more of a chronology about what happened when you were recruited for this job? Could you talk about joining presumably the company then going out on your first?

It was, compared with joining the navy at a later time, almost 10 years later, it was so simple, it's not true. One day, the Friday, I was at school, the next day, the Monday I was on the ship and we were sailing out through the heads in Port Philip Bay and from then on I learnt the hard way, what to do. There were four deck boys and we used to take it in turn week about to be Peggy. Now Peggy's job was to look after the seamen crew. Peggy had to get the food from the galley for each meal and tidy up in the mess afterwards. Peggy had to scrub out the seaman's quarters each day and those were menial tasks but they had their advantage. Peggy always had the best of the food that was available. Peggy could always have the afternoon off when all the others were working. So there were some advantages to it. That only happened once every four weeks.

Now I'm very intrigued, why was this position called Peggy?

Peggy is a female name and those menial tasks were rightly the prerogative of women, the second class citizen. You know you've heard of these creatures.

There maybe some debate about this later.

So that's how the name Peggy came about.

How did you feel about applying the name Peggy to yourself.

Wasn't particularly impressed, but it didn't worry me. I mean it wasn't me that was Peggy, but there were three others who took it in turns. So it didn't worry me.

I imagine occasionally that this was the source of some humour?

Only when I would be back from a trip. The trip would last probably six weeks then I would come back and we would replenish stores and I would meet up with some of my old school chums and I would "lord" it around you know, "I'm away fighting the war and you guys are still at

school." So those are the only occasions when it would come up. And I would studiously avoid mentioning the word Peggy. I would focus on the other duties that I had.

I was wondering about that. Now you have just mentioned the war effort, so you saw what you were doing as contributing to the war effort?

Oh very much so yes, because we had security passes to get on board ship at Williamstown. There were armed guards on the wharf. The ship was always blacked out at night. On the stern of the ship we had a gun, I think it must have been a World War I leftover, but it was quite a substantial looking thing. I don't know what the calibre would be, maybe 3 inch, and around the poop deck where the gun was mounted there were the magazines with the shells and the cordite packages. The gunner was a naval seaman, ex World War I. Funny old fella, Bill Bridgeman. Twice we had Japanese submarine scares while we were at sea. I used to fantasise about what I would do when we were attacked by a Japanese submarine. But in later years I realised that the Jap's would not attack us because they relied on the lighthouses operation as much as any other ship did. So they would not destroy us. They might of necessity want the food that we carried, they might of necessity want some of the fuel that we carried, but it was unlikely because the submarines were powered by diesel fuel and we carried furnace fuel oil to burn in the boilers on the ship, and the petrol and kerosene and the acetylene for the lighthouses. So it was unlikely that they would have attacked us for that reason, and they certainly wouldn't have sunk us.

How confident were you that the Japanese would know what the purpose of your ship was?

Oh, very confident. Both opposing forces, the Axis countries, Japan, Germany, the Allies all knew down to the last detail: descriptions, names, tonnage, capability, speed, of every vessel. They knew, yeah.

So it must have been a very good feeling of confidence to know that what you were doing was essential?

Oh well, I didn't realise that until later years. As I said I used to fantasise about what I would do when we were attacked. In later years coming with maturity, I realised that they wouldn't attack us, they relied on us.

So on an average journey how apprehensive were you about the possibility of attack?

Not very apprehensive. You see the routine of the ship would be to service the lighthouse. I will talk later about how we did that, but we would be in close proximity to the light, in relatively shallow water, or in a secure anchorage. So the possibility of an attack by a submarine was fairly remote at night time. In the day time we were vulnerable because we'd be—. Sorry, in the night time we were vulnerable because we were travelling between lights. We would service a light and then at the end of day's work we'd travel, sail to the next light, so that's when we were vulnerable at night time. That's why the ship was blacked out when we were travelling, but in the daytime at safe anchorage unlikely.

You have given us a bit of a description of the armaments of the ship. Can you give us more of an overall description of the ship itself including its size?

I could even show you a photograph.

We'll have a look at that later, but for the sake of whatever audience this is, just give us a description of the ship.

Gross tonnage, precisely 1406 tons. Small ship. Crew, in total, possibly 34, 35, which is a lot for a small ship

like that, but necessary because of the cargo handling and the method of cargo handling at the lights. Typically in those days what was called a three island ship. Now if you can imagine you are looking at the side of the ship, there is the bow of the stem and there is the stern and in between there is the island of the bridge and the living quarters. And in between the bow and the bridge there is a dip if you like, where the hold is, the foreign hold. Between the aft end of the island and the poop deck there is another dip where the after hold was. So a three island ship. An almost vertical stem as you look at the side, a straight stem and a counter stern. A counter stern meaning that instead of going down into the water like modern ships do we would go down and curve left before it went down. Old style of ship. It had masts and derricks, derricks being the devices that substituted for the work of cranes, modern ships have cranes these days. So, that's a description of the ship. Gross tonnage as I said 1406 tons net, cargo carrying capacity I think was something like 340 tons.

What were the conditions for both living and working aboard this ship?

For those days very good. The four deck boys had a cabin of their own with two double bunks, and the seaman had three cabins with four double bunks in each. As I said, typically a ship that size would probably carry no more than six seaman, two per watch, three watches, but because of the need for working hands to do the cargo work we had double that number.

And how was the ship fuelled?

She used to burn, there was a triple expansion reciprocating engine. That means that its steam driven, and the production of steam was by furnaces which burnt furnace fuel oil. The oil would be injected under pressure into the furnace and ignited. I was surprise the first time a saw it to see the hole, the size of the hole through which the furnace fuel was injected, and it was probably no more, a circular hole, no more than a millimetre in diameter. So the furnace fuel oil would be pumped under pressure, ignited, heat the water, turn to steam. The steam would then go into the first cylinder, which was like a car cylinder, but a lot bigger where it would exert the pressure on the gears, which would turn the propeller shaft. The steam would then go into the second cylinder, which was a lot bigger. Why was it bigger? Because the steam expands when it's used and then into the third cylinder, the big one, triple expansion.

Thanks for that description, that's something that is going to be very useful to technology historians et cetera in the future, and anyone who is into shipping I suppose.

A reciprocating engine, as I said, as opposed to a turbine, where reciprocating is meaning backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards.

What was the name of the ship?

Cape York, there were three lighthouse supply ships, us, *Cape York* for South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania. There was *Cape Moreton*, I think was the other one, and *Cape Leeuwin* which was the third one. They were subsequently replaced, probably in the early 1950s by three others, which again have subsequently been replaced by one ship, which is under contract now to the Australian Lighthouse Service. The rest of the time it chases ships in the southern ocean that are fishing for the Patagonian "what's a name" fish. Can't think of the name of the vessel. *Southern Aurora*, *Southern Cross*, *Southern* something or other.

It must have been fairly liberating for you to get away from the home front and suddenly have a sense of freedom. How did that feel for you?

Absolutely wonderful. I was with a group of young boys, we were all 16, 17, 18 with common interests. The crew were old salts, too old to go to the war, average age was probably 45, 50. The officers, there were three deck officers and the captain were interested in the boys and frequently we would be sat in the corner and given instruction on ship handling, fundamentals of navigation, the effects of wind, tide, currents on ship movements. Every now and again we would be sent to the wheel house to take control of the ship. Learnt to box the compass. The old seamen took an interest in us showing us how to tie knots, tie hitches, splice ropes. It was a good life. Exciting.

Now you have mentioned various crew members. Can you talk us through how many crew there were and maybe talk about some of the key personalities there?

Yes, okay. The skipper was Captain Claire. Interesting man, he had a funny habit of using the "Eh." "Mr Mac"—Mackenzie was the first mate—"Mr Mac, we will turn to tomorrow morning eh, at 07:00, all hands having had had breakfast, eh, and number two, second, he'll go ashore on the first boat eh, and you'll take the second boat, eh."

Sounds like verbal equivalent of the rising inflection.

Yeah. So that was the skipper. The chief engineer, I think he must have been about 170 years old. Little wizened man, hunched shoulders, sparkling eyes, a Scot. He had an unending repertoire of stories. Funny little man. The bo'sun was a big man, Eric Mussared. Eric shared a cabin with the carpenter and he hated it. He was a person of importance, he was the supervisor of the seaman, second to the captain in his opinion. The carpenter, Ernie Cooper, he was a tradesman. But he had to share the cabin with him. One of the jobs of the Peggy was each day, to go down to the bo'sun's quarters and get his orders for the particular food that he wanted. He wanted ketchup. "Mind you, ketchup, I don't want any of this muck they called sauce." It had to be ketchup. As you walked out of the door Ernie the carpenter would grab you and say, "Get some tomato sauce too." Now these provisions came from the Chief Steward. I think the Chief Steward to the day he died had records of every item he ever issued on every day to every deck boy. A meticulous record keeper. Funny man. Who else did we have? There were only six stokers, as opposed to the twelve seamen, because all the stokers had to do was to keep the engine running. And there was nothing special that I remember about them. But yeah, Eric Mussared, the bo'sun, Ernie Cooper, Captain Claire.

Was Captain Claire a good captain?

I'd say he was. He was certainly a good seaman. He knew the coastline like the back of his hand. He never had to refer to a chart. If we were leaving Wilson's Promontory heading for Cliffy Island he knew precisely which direction to steer. He knew when we would need to leave Swan Island, for example to get to Deal Island, without having reference to anyone, or any thing, or any chart, or any timetable, or any tide movements. Yeah, I would say he was a good seaman.

There seems to have been quite a good camaraderie and mateship among the crew?

There was, yes, the captain of course being the captain would hold himself aloof and remote as much as he could from the others. But the first mate, McKenzie, and

the second mate and on the occasions that we would have a third mate, and the wireless operator, they were all friendly, they would all stop and talk.

And did you have good sea legs? Did you ever get seasick?

Interesting, for the whole of my years in the merchant navy and the navy the very first day at sea I would feel very uncomfortable, but thereafter no matter how rough it got, no problem at all.

Did you regard the sea as a friend, or an enemy?

Oh, something to be very careful of. Never to trust. Always respect it. I despair of some of these people these days who go to sea from places near where I used to live, Kiama, Gerringong, Jervis Bay, in cockle shell aluminium dinghies with an outboard motor, and they are swamped by the sea, or turned over by the wind. They have no concept of the tremendous power of the sea. So 100 per cent unabiding, unequivocal respect for the sea.

What were the main waters that you sailed in aboard this ship?

Okay, from Port Philip Bay, west to the …

This is in the lighthouse ship?

Yes. West, to the eastern end of the Great Australian Bite, from Port Philip Bay east to Cape Everard, Gabo Island, literally all around Tasmania, as far south as Maatsuyker Island, which is a little island right to the very south of Tasmania.

Okay, so George, perhaps we could start off this next tape by you describing how you would drop the supplies off to the lighthouses?

Well, as I said before the seaman crew on the lighthouse supply ship was typically double on what you might find on a ship that size, and the reason is that all of the goods had to manhandled quite literally manhandled ashore. Now the ship carried four large motorboats. So we would arrive at a lighthouse typically say 6 o'clock in the morning. Two of the motorboats would be lowered over the side and the hatches either the forward or the after hatch, depending where the goods were stowed in the ship, were located, would be opened. The derricks which are the cranes in those days would be rigged and two of the crew, two of the seaman crew, would go down into the hold with cargo nets or whatever else was necessary to load the gear. They would put the gear to be offloaded into the cargo nets. The hook would come down from the derrick and lift the cargo net up under the direction of the bo'sun. The bo'sun would direct two other seamen who were on the winches. One winch would lift the cargo net out of the hold. The other winch would take over via the second derrick and swing the cargo net over the side of the ship and then that winch would take control and lower the cargo net into the motor boat. In the motor boat were two other people, typically an able seaman who was the coxswain, and the bowhand which was one of the deck boys. And this was the exciting part of the job as a 16 year old. The motor boat would then, once it was loaded proceed to where the goods would be unloaded. Now in good cases like at Swan Island for example, off the Tasmanian coast, there would be a wharf, and the motor boat would come alongside the wharf. And on the wharf would be two more seamen with a hand winch and they would manually unwind the winch, so the hook would come down into the motor boat, pick up the cargo net and they would wind the winch, the hand winch, to lift the cargo

net and then manually swing the boom of the lift and then drop the cargo net onto the wharf. So that process was fairly standard, simple, straightforward under good weather conditions.

On Maatsuyker Island, which I mentioned previously, you never had good weather conditions. There was always strong wind, always a surge of the waves and it was an interesting experience. First of all getting the gear into the boat along side the ship because the boat would be rising and falling. The ship would be rolling and it was even more exciting getting the goods out of the boat because the boat would be surging backwards and forwards on the waves alongside the wharf. Interesting experience. There were other occasions when it was even more exciting. For example, in those places where there was no wharf we had to get the gear ashore by other means. Now the classic case in point was Tasman Island. Tasman Island is on the southeast coast of Tasmania. It is a very big island in terms of height but not very big in terms of area. Probably at the top the area would be three or four hectares. Height above sea level, getting close to a thousand feet. Now I want you to imagine you are looking east at the coast of Tasmania and you are looking at Cape Pillar. Cape Pillar is again about a thousand feet high and separating Cape Pillar from Tasman Island is an expanse of water, which might be, at the most, a kilometre, perhaps three quarters of a kilometre. Between Cape Pillar and Tasman Island is a rock protruding out of the water by perhaps 20 or 30 feet. Distance from Tasman Island by perhaps 200 metres at the most. On the side of the sheer cliff of Tasman Island, 80 feet above the water there was a landing constructed, right into the side of the cliff. Now I want you to imagine you are standing on this landing and there is a tripod, a strong tripod mounted on the landing and from the top of this tripod running down at an angle of about 45 degrees is a heavy steel wire which is anchored into this rock. Now on this steel wire is a pulley and on the bottom of this pulley is a large basket, a wicker basket that can hold quite comfortably four adults. Now imagine you are standing on this landing, 80 feet above the water. You step into the basket which is lifted vertically two or three feet so it clears the deck and the railing of the landing. It then runs on the pulley, at an angle of 45 degrees down the steel wire until it hits a stop, a mechanical stop that's bolted to the wire. The basket is then lowered vertically towards the water. So the motor boat coming from *Cape York* which is lying off the island two or three hundred metres, proceeds with the gear; 24 gallon drums of fuel, the acetylene, cylinders of gas, the food, the clothing, proceeds and stations itself underneath the basket. It's rising and falling on the waves, it's being moved occasionally by the wind, it's being moved by the current and the skill of the coxswain is to position the boat such that the skill of the operator on the landing can lower the basket close to, but not right on top of the boat. Then the skill of the deck boy comes in. He has to manhandle these items into the basket so that the basket is then lifted vertically up to the wire, then 45 degrees up to the landing, and then down onto the landing where it is unloaded manually and put into a flying fox. The flying fox is a railway that goes up the side of Tasman Island at an angle of at least 70 degrees, almost a thousand feet up to the top.

Now in good weather that's fine. On those occasions when you have live cargo, like a sheep, it gets even more difficult. Chooks, easy to handle, put them in a crate, lift them into a basket and away they go. Sheep, they seem to have 16 legs kicking each time. But the worst situation is when you have a cow or a horse. Now the way to get

the cow or a horse ashore is to build a pontoon. You have two empty 24, 44 gallon empty drums supported by a couple of transverse pieces of timber and the horse is lowered into the water, lashed to these two pieces of timbers which is supported by the drums so that the horse is in the water, but is not supporting itself. That then is towed by the motorboat to wherever it has to go, and again if you are going to a place like Wedge Island in the Great Australian Bite, then you can take the horse to the shore, unshackle it and it can run up the beach. But when you are going to a place like Tasman Island and you have to get this poor wretched horse up 80 feet, it's a work of art.

So how did you get the horse up?

Well lift it, leave it in its cradle and lift the cradle. The horse is lifted in the cradle. You take the basket off and lift the cradle with the horse in it. Fortunately we only had to do that sort of thing twice. But most of the islands it was relatively straightforward. They either had a beach where you could do that sort of thing, or they had a landing where it could be done. And of course the humans, they had to travel the same way. It must have been fun for the women, getting out of the ship, into the motor boat, floating up and down, into the basket, being lifted into the flying fox, up a thousand feet. Lighthouse keeper families I think deserve medals for the trials and tribulations they had to put up with. Men, you expect that, women and children, it makes it difficult. Although when the children get to the age of us deck boys, it's high adventure, it's excitement, it's fun.

That's remarkable.

Yes. Now when the weather was really bad, particularly around the Tasmanian coast, we had to shelter. Many times I've been into Wine Glass Bay; now I don't know if you have been to Wine Glass Bay as a tourist; absolutely gorgeous, the most spectacular perfect looking expanse, crescent shaped expanse of white sand and crystal clear blue water. Absolutely beautiful. Either that or we'd go into Port Arthur. Many is the time I have been into Port Arthur as a boy; in those days Port Arthur was just the ruins of a penal settlement. There was no commercialisation, nothing, and you could walk among the ruins, you could wonder around Dead Island quite freely. Nowadays, of course, you can't do that.

What was the morale like on board?

Oh high, very high. We were all working as a team towards a common end and we knew that what we were doing was of benefit to other people, benefit to the lighthouse keepers and their families. Either getting them gear, food and so on, or either bringing them ashore, bringing them onto the ship so they could go back home.

Now you've obviously mentioned the extraordinary feat of taking supplies to that particular lighthouse that you mentioned before. Were there any other tricky lighthouse supply drop offs?

Yes, Citadel Island, which is just off the south coast of Victoria on the eastern side. An unmanned light, no landing whatsoever, and what we had to do there was to wait for the weather to be fine. We would then bring the motor boat up to the rock, there was no beach at all, just bare rock. Bring the motor boat up to the beach, sufficiently close so that the bough hand could jump onto the rock, get his feet wet of course. Take the painter, which is the name given to the rope, the bough rope, and to hold the boat sufficiently forward whilst the coxswain would put the boat engine slowly into reverse so that it had the opposing forces of the motor pulling the boat back and the bough hand pulling the boat forward

to keep the boat relatively stationery, relative to the rock regardless to the water movement. We would always have a third hand then who would get out of the boat, stand up to his waist or knees and manhandle the goods out. Now that's okay if the things are light, but most of the goods at Citadel island were simply the acetylene gas cylinders which stood about five feet tall, were probably about, at the most, 15 inches diameter and weighed 40 or 50 kilograms. That was hard work, and having got them out then the bough hand and the third man would then manhandle, drag, carry, pull, these gas cylinders up to the light, which fortunately wasn't very far up the hill, maybe 100 yards, 200 yards up the hill, but the hill was fairly steep, while the coxswain stood off in the boat waiting for us to return. We would then, having got the cylinders up the top, disconnect the existing cylinders, place the new ones in position, connect them up, test that the system worked, that the gas flowed and then drag the empty cylinders down the hill and repeat the process in reverse getting them back into the boat. So that was one. Cape Forestier on the east coast of Tasmania, north of Tasman Island was another quite difficult one where you couldn't actually get ashore. What you had to do was to lift the goods out of the boat while standing in the shallow water and manhandle them ashore. And then again manhandle them up this steep hill until you got to the light. Fortunately Cape Forestier is now out of action and they built another lighthouse a little bit further north, about seven or eight kilometres further north. That's serviced by the road. So those days of tough manhandling fortunately are gone. Tasman Island these days, which used to take us and the whole ship even in good weather two days, can be done now as an unattended light, by helicopter in a matter of an hour or so.

So how long would be, you just mentioned two days.

How long would a typical drop of supplies take?

Well, if we left Melbourne for the southern run which was the south east of Victoria and Tasmania. That whole run might take five or six weeks. If the weather was good we could do a light in one day. If the weather was bad we might sit there in safety for perhaps five or six days. And that was when we had fun. Fishing, and getting crayfish. I despair these days when I see these poor little crayfish in the fish shops. In those days we would stop overnight somewhere because of the bad weather put the crayfish nets over the side having caught a couple of kingfish first and cut their heads off as bait. Pull up the crayfish nets in the morning and throw out crayfish that were 3 times the size of these poor little things you see in the fish shops now. Crayfish, even with the tail curled, from the eyes back to the tail curl, 18 inches, that was what we would keep. We'd cook them, break the tail off put the tail in the ships freezer so that when we got back home we'd have lots of nice crayfish to eat. We'd also eat those that were cooked on board too.

Sounds like you ate like kings.

Oh, we did, we did. Even though it was during wartime we had good food. There was always butter, there was ham on Sundays. The main meal of the day was at lunchtime and there was always a roast with three vegetables. We ate exceedingly well.

You are making me hungry.

You'll have to wait, I'm afraid.

Now you mentioned that there was a couple of times, you thought there was Japanese nearby. Could you tell us about those experiences?

Well there's not much to tell. It was one Sunday the first incident and being the deck boys we had the afternoon

off, sitting on the poop deck under the gun and all of a sudden I noticed that the wake of the ship instead of running astern of us, was turning. We turned around and hot footed it back to where we had come from and we wanted to know why. We asked the bo'sun who asked the first mate who asked skipper and he said, "There's been a scare of a submarine and we're not going to take any risks so we are going to hide," which we did. I mentioned earlier on that the most vulnerable time we experienced was night time but this was in broad daylight. And the other occasion was at night. We were steaming between two lights and there was no alarm system on the ship but all of a sudden the bo'sun poked his nose into our quarters and he said, "Get your life jackets out, get ready, there's a scare." But that was the closest we ever came to it.

How real was the fear of being attacked by the Japanese?

For us youngsters, deck boys it was almost as though we hoped we would be attacked. More excitement. But for the older fellows who knew what it was about they were most apprehensive, most apprehensive, as I would be these days in that sort of situation.

Now doing these drops every three months to these different lighthouses, I imagine that the people that you were making these deliveries to would have been very enthusiastic about seeing some fresh faces about the place?

Oh, absolutely, yes. Particularly the women folk and the children of the keepers we'd bring off to go home. They'd always bring us presents, and these presents would be farm produce. Particularly eggs, duck eggs, chook eggs, cakes that they'd made. We were really welcome. It made you feel good.

I imagine that they would also be craving news?

No, because they had good wireless communication. Most of it was by Morse of course, because radio telephony in those days was not very advanced. But, yes, they new what was happening, what was going on around the world.

And you've mentioned your three other deckhand mates. What were they like?

One of them Spike, I can't remember his surname, was the son of one of the stokers, and that was a funny experience. Spike and his dad, each day they would see each other. The stokers slept on the starboard side, down below. The seamen slept on the port side down below and each day Spike and his dad would see each other and they would just nod. And that was the only communication throughout the whole day. Fascinating. Another one was Ray White. He ended up a real estate agent in Hobart. I don't think it was the Ray White we know about but an interesting little sideline here. About eight years ago now, Shirley and I had a holiday in Queensland and Townsville of course, you have to go to Townsville if you can fight your way through all the Japanese tourists. One day we went on a trip on a boat, a big boat twin hull thing out to one of the islands. And in inevitable fashion as we left, I went up to the wheelhouse to supervise, to make sure the coxswain knew what he was doing. I looked at this fella and I said, "I know your face." A young fellow in his early twenties, and to make conversation with me he said, "I hope you're not feeling seasick." I said, "No, I never get seasick, many years at sea." "In fact," I said, "I started off as a deck boy on a little ship in the Bass Strait. A lighthouse supply ship." He looked at me and said, "My dad was on the lighthouse supply ship." And I said, "Was his name? Ray White?" He said, "Yes!"

How about that for a coincidence?

Fantastic.

And the other one was Nick, Don Nicholls. Now Don was every young woman's epitome of what a man should be. Don was tall, well built. He had crinkly sparely eyes, he had crinkly black hair, he had the most gorgeous charm and personality you could ever think of. He had pimples, but the girls just ignored those. So those were my contemporaries.

Now did you get up to much mischief with your other deckhands?

There wasn't the opportunity, more importantly perhaps there wasn't the motivation. The worst mischief we got up to was once when we were in Williamstown waiting to go to sea the next day. Ray White said to me, "Lets go up the pub." And I said, "We can't go up the pub, I'm too young." He said "Come on, let's go up the pub." So we went up the pub and had two glasses of beer, and I was "stonkered" on two glasses of beer. But in those days Williamstown was bustling. Full of ships, naval establishments, naval police, pubs. Down at Williamstown there was Williamstown, North Williamstown, Williamstown Pier and something or other else Williamstown. And I think there was something like 18 pubs. Nowadays you might be lucky to find one. But in terms of getting up to mischief, no. We were probably a bit more sophisticated than youngsters these days. For example one of the things we did in Hobart was we pooled our money and hired a car with a driver and went up Mount Wellington. Now can you imagine four young men doing that these days? "Boring!" Another time in Adelaide we went to the Mission for Seamen. The Mission for Seamen still exists and it's a church run activity, interdenominational, and its run for the benefit of foreign seaman visiting Australia. And you can go there and you have communion, if that's what you want. You can have a light meal, you can play table tennis, you can talk to the duty pastor about any problems you might have. So those were the sort of things that we did. No mischief.

Now, what happened when you came to leave the lighthouse supply ship?

Yes, the war had finished.

Before we get onto that then. How did you, what do you recall of the end of the war?

I was in Adelaide for VE [Victory in Europe] Day. And that was the most subdued celebration I've ever seen I think. Adelaide in those days was known as the City of Churches and I think that about 99.99 per cent of the population in celebration of the end of the European war went to church. As opposed to VP [Victory in the Pacific] Day or VE Day in Sydney where everyone went wild in the streets as you might have seen from historic records. Totally different reaction.

And what went through your mind when you heard that World War II had ended?

I guess one of the things that went through my mind was, "Well, what happens now, you got into this because of a burning desire to defend your country." That was the real reason that I, that and the home situation, those two things together. At that point I started to develop a little bit of maturity. I started to let the brain do the decision making, rather than the emotions. And I thought, "There has got to be something different, there has got to be something better. What are the options?" One of the options was to study for four years and get a mates ticket in the merchant navy, to become a merchant navy officer. And that had some appeal, because it was furthering on

the knowledge that I had acquired, and was going to touch on things that I had more than a passing interest in, which was navigation and ship handling. So that was one option. But I felt that if I did that in the Commonwealth Lighthouse Service, it would be very restrictive. I would be limited to going into the lighthouses in Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania, that was it. As opposed to getting out of that and getting into the broader stream of the merchant service and that then caused me to resign from the job as. I was an ordinary seaman by this time, promoted. Resigned as an ordinary seaman from the Commonwealth Lighthouse Service and as they said at the time "Go on the coast." Now "on the coast" meant that you joined another merchant ship that travelled elsewhere around Australia. The company that I joined was the New Zealand Steam Navigation Company. The ship was *Kini*, a Maori word and *Kini*'s task was to, she also was a very small ship about 1300 tons, and had to be for a particular reason, which I will tell you about. *Kini*'s responsibility was to go to Strahan on the west coast of Tasmania, pick up copper ore and take it to Port Kembla, unload it at Port Kembla. Pick up beer at Port Kembla and take it back to Strahan, now that was the role. Now the ships at the time *Kini*, *Kowhai*, can't think of the name of the other one but all New Zealand boats had to be small in order to get through what they call Hell's Gates, which is the entry to the big harbour on which Strahan is situated. I don't know if you have ever been to Tasmania but you've heard of the Franklin River, Franklin River flows into; what's the name of this harbour? Very big harbour. Doesn't matter it will come to me in a minute. And incidentally Sarah Island is situated in this harbour. You've read a book, or heard of a book called For the Term of his Natural Life, based on Sarah Island. So that's the area. In those days Mount Lyle was very viable and very active in terms of mining. And they used to mine the copper at Mount Lyle, put it in these little railway trucks and take it down to Regatta Point at Strahan, where the gantry would lift the truck off the bogeys, take it over to the hold of the ship, tip it upside down and the copper ore would go into the ship. Now that was my first introduction to trade unionism and I didn't like what I saw. I don't need to go into the details.

Well it might be good to go into a little bit of detail. What was your experience there?

Bribery, corruption, exerting unnecessary, undue influence on the management. And the management in return acting in a confrontational way. Trade unions, management were poles apart and to my innocent but logical mind I thought, "What's the point in this, you're both in this business towards a common end, a common objective. Why not get together, why not understand each other's perspective and point of view. Why not cooperate to the benefit of both parties and the end result?" Time and again I would see this. I remember one occasion in Strahan, the bo'sun came down to the seaman's quarters where I was and he said, "Do you want to earn a few bob [shillings]?", and I said, "Yeah, sure." He said, "We have got to double up the lines." Now doubling up the lines means that if the ship is tied up with two lines forward, two ropes forward and a couple of wires amidships, doubling up the lines means adding two lots of headlines and stern lines and two lots of spring wires as they called themselves, because the weather was turning sour. Now that took the bo'sun and myself about probably 20 minutes to double up the lines. He said, "You can claim three hours overtime for that." I said, "You're joking." He said, "No." He said, "They," meaning the management, "the ships officers

want us to do it, but we will do it on our terms." Now to me, that was nice to have the three hours overtime but what a way to go about it. So that was another simple little example of the effect of trade unionism. So after those sorts of experiences I thought, "There's got to be a better way to earn a living." I didn't know what it was. So I quit that job and took a job as a painter's assistant, painting houses while I looked for things to do. Didn't take long. I happened to see a notice in a newspaper, an advertisement in a newspaper one day and coincidentally at much the same time, there were radio announcements that the Royal Australian Navy was looking for recruits to train as radar mechanics and they had to have education in Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics at leaving certificate level. Now I had that training but I didn't have that level, because I left in February 1945 in the year that I would have qualified. But I thought I'll try. So I applied, I was interviewed and they said, "Well you don't have the educational qualifications, but from the tests we've given you, you appear to have the basic knowledge. We'll take you on." And that was the start of my career in the Royal Australian Navy and the reason it came about.

Thank you. That was a wonderful transition from the lighthouse supply ships to the navy. So you talked a bit about the enlistment that you underwent. Can you go into a bit more detail about when and where you enlisted?

In the navy?

Yes.

Ok, the first introduction was at HMAS *Lonsdale*, now a multi storey accommodation down in Port Melbourne. That was the naval base for Victoria at the time. We went through all the medical tests, vaccinations, inoculations. That probably took about three days. Each day I would go down there, they would take details, they would give you an inoculation, they would measure blood pressure and then I would go home, and the next day. And eventually they said, "Okay, on the 24th of September you will report here and you will join the rest of the recruits who are coming in on this intake." So on the 24th of September, in the morning, I went down to Port Melbourne. All of us eager recruits got into a bus and we were driven to HMAS *Cerberus* down in Crib Point, used to be referred to in those days as Flinders Naval Depot, although it's miles from Flinders. But that was, and still is, the recruit training school for the Royal Australian Navy. Later on, if it becomes appropriate I will tell you what I think of the training that was given to us at the time. On arrival there the first thing we did was we were lined up and read the riot act.

So, George if we can continue the story on from the bus?

Yes, we had the bus ride down to Flinders Naval Depot, HMAS *Cerberus*. Don't remember anything about the ride, but the first thing I do remember about arriving there was coming through what was then the main gate. The main gate there has now been blocked off. At the main gate there was a sentry box with a sentry and two very big old figureheads from sailing ships. Remember in the old days they used to have the women or men or saints carved intricately out of wood and painted garish colours. Two of those; one on either side of the gate. That was my first introduction to HMAS *Cerberus*.

Can you recall what the figureheads were of?

No, I don't. They are probably still down there in the archive somewhere. So the bus has proceeded down the road, stopped outside J block, the recruit school. Ordered out of the bus, stand to attention. "I said stand to

attention!" "Don't move." All of a sudden we were in discipline, all in civvies [civilian clothing]. "Right the first thing we are going to do to you is give you a haircut." So we all lined up at the barber and our heads were completely shorn of hair. Next thing we were taken to slops. Slops is the in word for clothing equipment. "What size shoes do you take?" "8." "Here's some 9s." "What are these things?" "Those, my son, are shirts, you wear a shirt under your uniform. You do not wear a dickie front." "What's a dickie front?" Well a dickie front was purported to look like a shirt. It's a square piece of material with a blue strip across the top and it was tied around the body with string, tape. So that it fitted snugly against the body, as opposed to the shirts which were voluminous, and they looked untidy. So the real sailors wore dickie fronts in their tiddly suits. Tiddly was "in", you know, swagging bell-bottoms and cap flat aback. Whereas the "pussa", purser, a corruption of the word purser. The pussa uniform was drab with a shirt instead of a dickie shirt with its hat square on the brow. "You will not wear tiddly gear; you will wear uniform gear, with your hair cut."

So why weren't you allowed to wear the dickie top?

Because it was unhygienic. The shirt, of course, covered the armpits and so on. And it was also warmer, and it absorbed the perspiration whereas the dickie front didn't. For the next six weeks then we experienced recruit school. We were given our hammocks and we were taught how to lash up and stow the hammock.

How do you lash up?

Imagine a room like this and across the room at a height of about two and a bit metres are big steel bars that are separated physically by about probably three metres. Now between those two iron bars the hammock is slung. At each end of the hammock there is a rope and the rope goes around the iron bar at one end and is fixed to the ring in the hammock at that end and the same the other end. Now around the hammock in which is the mattress, is a rope, and that rope circles and lashes the hammock with seven circles. Not six, not eight, seven, have you got that, seven. So each night we would put our hammocks up and we would unlash them, and at "lights out" which was at 10 o'clock, into those hammocks, not a noise, not a sound, you'll go to sleep. Six o'clock in the morning the duty recruit instructor would come around with a big stick and he would belt the bottom of the hammocks. Couldn't hurt you of course because of the padding of the mattress and so on. "Out, out, out, wakey, wakey. Sun will burn your eyes out!" "Up, up, up!" So you'd leap out of bed, put on your shorts and your runners and your shirt, outside. Physical instruction for 20 minutes. Inside, shower, shave, get dressed. Breakfast seven thirty.

What was involved in physical instruction?

Hand presses, running on the spot, jumping up and down and all those traditional things. Breakfast was great. First up was burgoo. Burgoo is a Scottish name and it means porridge. Now you couldn't have sugar on your porridge, you could have milk if you like but no sugar. Boiled eggs, toast, butter, jam, marmalade, no bacon, no fried eggs, boiled eggs, because they could be thrown into a container, a hundred of them and boiled up and then dished out After breakfast was colours. Now colours was at 8 o'clock. Everyone in the recruit establishment, and there were probably, and this means the ship company and all those undergoing advanced training and officers going under training and recruits, and there might be five or six hundred. And they would line up around the parade ground in our divisions and the

officer in charge of each group would call us to attention. And he would report us to the senior officer with the parade and precisely at 8 o'clock the signalman would announce to the officer on the parade, "8 o'clock sir" and the officer on parade would respond, "Make it so." The signalmen would then raise the flag, the ensign and the band would strike up and play "God Save the Queen", and the signalman had to get that flag to the masthead as the last strains of "God Save the King" were being played. If he got it there before, or he got it there after the end he was in trouble. But I used to like that "8 o'clock sir," "Make it so." So after that we would all then march off to the band to our various training activities, and for us it was the bull ring. Now the bullring was a large area perhaps two acres of fine red dust and we would "square bash" in this until morning teatime. What do they call it, not smoko, stand easy? For ten minutes then we could have a drink of water out of the tap, no cups of tea, no luxuries like that. And then until lunchtime more square bashing. Marching backwards and forwards, learning to form on the left, learning to form on the right, learning to slow march, learning to salute by numbers, learning to salute. All this sort of thing. In reality when I look back at it, it was simply instilling discipline. What we learnt in the way of practical things like how to salute and how to march you could teach in a matter of ten minutes, but the key thing was discipline. When you had an order you obeyed it, implicitly and you did it to the very best of your ability. And that went on for six weeks, and during those six weeks while our hair was still growing again we were restrained from going ashore Even in a naval establishment on shore, if you leave it, you are still going ashore. And the highlight of the week then was Sunday. In the drill hall on Sunday was prayers. So we would go along to the drill hall on Sunday and have prayers and sing hymns. Now the officers were in one section; the menials, like me, at the time, were in the other section, but up top were the WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service] and this was our first and only sight of females for the whole week, so that was the reason why going to prayers was so looked forward to. But that drill hall was a remarkable place. It had a smell about it that was wonderful. I'm sure that the amount of polish that was put on that floor would sink a destroyer over the years it was put on. It was used by the gunnery school for practice indoors when it was wet, raining. It was used for physical training, climbing ropes to the ceiling. It was used for the theatre, the movies on Saturday nights. It was used for the Roman Catholics' communion, sorry, holy communion or whatever it was they have in the mornings. Then later the Anglicans for "holy commotion" as we used to call it, and it was used for the general service. On one occasion the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra came down and it was used for a symphony recital. But it was a remarkable building and has since been unfortunately demolished because it was just falling into disrepair. But repeating what I said before, it had this wonderful aroma of tar, of rope, of polish. All the brass work in there was polished daily. Wonderful place.

Now you mentioned to us before when you were talking us through a typical day that you would stop for stand easy then do some more square bashing. What would happen next in your typical day?

The bugle would sound at ten minutes to twelve, midday. Which means that all recruits would re-group, form up on the road. The band would appear again, precisely at 12 o'clock we would march up the road and back to recruit school where we were dismissed and we would line up for lunch. Lunch was a wonderful meal, always

hot cooked on cold days. There would be soup. There was always plenty of bread and butter and jam on the tables. It was always a roast of some sort, although very rarely chicken, mainly beef, lamb, pork. Lots of vegetables, lots of gravy. After lunch you could do what you like for at least half an hour. You could write a letter home, you could sit and do nothing. You could wash out some underwear or socks. Then at one o'clock the procedure would be repeated again. You would form up on the road in your divisions. The band would come back again and you would march of to your point and place of training. And this was for the whole of the establishment, whether you were an officer undergoing advanced training, an officer undergoing preliminary training, petty officers or chief petty officers doing advanced training, right down to the recruits. The whole establishment was geared to discipline and training. Then stand easy in the afternoon, then again at ten minutes to four, the bugle would sound again, 4 o'clock, march back to recruit school and then your time was your own for the rest of the day unless you were in the duty watch. There were three duty watches and duty watch responsibility was to sweep out the quarters, clean out the heads, which are the toilets and the showers and to stand by for rounds. Standing by for rounds means that at 8pm the duty officer would come around to inspect the quarters. If you were on duty you would stand at the door, salute the officer as he came, report, "J Block ready for inspection, sir." "Very well, let us inspect." And the odd thing was that you were allowed to have your hammock up at that stage and if you wanted to you could be in your hammock and as the officer came through you had to pretend to be asleep. If you were out of your hammock you had to stand to attention. And some of the things that the officer would look at would be to make sure that each locker where you had your personal effects, was correctly stowed. He'd open a locker up, the boots, two pairs of boots, had to be there in that position, not there, or there, but there. Your shirts had to be folded there, your underwear had to be folded there, your socks had to be there, your spare suit had to be folded up, seven creases in the bell-bottoms, inside out, folded up in seven creases. The towel had to be on the rack immediately above your locker, folded in three so that your name, stamped on the towel, showed directly at the bottom. Those were the important things he had to look at. And he'd always find something wrong. And again, in retrospect, it was part of the discipline.

This is incredible detail that you are giving us. I'm really enjoying this detail. You are doing such a great job. What did you think about this? What was your opinion about the recruitment training that you were doing?

At the time, bloody stupid. I mean I know how to salute. I know how to march. I know how to swing my arms. Why go on for weeks after weeks? Then the bullring where you are covered in dust and you take your boots and your socks off at night to have a shower and you are covered in red dust, absolutely stupid. But thinking back, vitally important, you are in an organisation where tomorrow, almost literally, you would be at sea fighting the enemy. You are given an order, you carry out that order, and you might survive. You don't carry out that order, you would be killed. And that's the importance of it, instilling discipline in people.

How did you get on with your fellow recruits.

I was in a very fortunate position because most of them, in fact all of them in my group either came from school or from other jobs. I came from the merchant navy. I

knew what a ship was and at recruit school, on those occasions where we were taken into the equipment room, I knew what a sail was, I knew what a cringle was, I knew what a bowline was in terms of rope handling. I knew how to splice; I knew all of those things. So I was a, not a hero, but someone to be respected.

How long did the training last for?

Six weeks.

And what happened after that?

We then were sent off to our various trade schools, because in the recruit school you would be all mashed together. There would be seaman, there would be stokers, there would be telegraphists, there would be cooks, there would be stewards, there would be radio mechanics. Now they all went off to their various schools. All the schools, except our school, were part of HMAS *Cerberus*. Our school was in Adelaide. We were based at HMAS *Torrens*, again no longer there. That's at Port Adelaide. Each day we would get into buses and we would be bussed up to the port road to what is now the University of South Australia. In those days it was called the South Australian School of Mines. And there for the next six months we underwent technical training in basic electrics, how motors and generators work, how alternators work, basic radio. We were introduced to the thermionic valve, which hardly exists any more. We built our own radio transmitters, we built our own radio receivers so that at the end of six months we were pretty skilled as radio technicians in fundamental radio technology.

How many other men were you training with?

In my class there were nine people. Now that program started in December 1945 and went through to April 1947 and that was the subject of the book that I wrote. In that period something like 15 classes of on average ten people went through. So the School of Mines and HMAS *Torrens* turned out something like 140 radio, radar mechanics. Quite a number of them fell by the wayside. Didn't like it or found the training a bit tough. But most of us survived it.

And what were the instructors like?

They were a mixture. There was one fellow; I'm trying to think of his nickname. Can't think of it. They were all very competent in their respective fields. All except one by the name of Don Crowley was ex civilian. They were all in their 40s, 50s having been in commercial radio and related activities previous to being recruited by the navy to come in. Actually they weren't recruited by the navy to come in; they were recruited by the School of Mines, who had the contract to do the training for us in the navy, all with the exception of this fellow Don Crowley, who was an ex HO radio mechanic. HO meaning Hostilities Only. He had done his time in the navy and was discharged, and then became an instructor. Oh, Practical Jack was the name of the fellow I was trying to think of; Practical Jack. Don was the only ex naval person, and we got along well with him because in terms of age he was sort of like us. We were 17, 18, 19, 20 at the outside and Don was less than 30. So there was a personal relationship there. But the others were like our great uncles, but they were all very competent guys.

Could you define for us what exactly was the role of the, is it radar, or is radio?

Both.

Both.

They were known as radio mechanics but they had the responsibility of the maintenance of all electronics

equipment, which included radar. Some were initially trained on radio and then cross-trained later onto radar. And that happened after the time at Adelaide. We were then moved to HMAS *Watson* in Sydney for four months where we did our specialised training. And as I said, some were trained specifically in the advanced radio communications stuff; the big transmitters. I will tell you about one of them in a minute. And some were trained in the pulse technique of radar. Now we did that training after the radio training, and the radar training was at HMAS *Watson*. The radio people then went on to Canberra for another six weeks. And there are two establishments at Canberra, HMAS *Harman*, which was the receiving station for all of the radio transmissions in the Royal Australian Navy into Australia, from anywhere in the world. And Belconnen. Now Belconnen was not an HMAS for some peculiar reason. *Harman* was a ship, Belconnen wasn't. Belconnen at that time had the biggest radio transmitter in the southern hemisphere. It had a power output of 200 kilowatts. It had a very low frequency. It was 32 kilocycles, kilohertz. Now that's very, very low frequency and the combined power and low frequency, I don't know if you know anything about radio transmission, but let me just digress and explain that for a bit. VHF, Very High Frequency, the communication technique that is used by aircraft for example, very high frequency which is from 100 up to 160 kilohertz. That is what they call "line of sight" transmission. If you transmit a radio signal at that frequency it goes line of sight, in a straight line. Therefore, height above the terrain is important in getting distance because of the curvature of the earth. Now low frequency radio waves are not line of sight. They follow the curvature of the earth, and they can only follow it so far as the power that it emits. Now this transmitter at Belconnen as I said had 200 kilowatts power output which is small now compared with some but because of the combined power output and the low frequency, that transmitter could transmit to any Australian naval ship, anywhere in the world. Direct transmission without satellite links. Now the aerial for that was huge. If you imagine three 600 feet high radio steel masts with a wire stretched between and the transmitting signal going up a wire as thick as my thumb to the aerial, that was the method of transmission. And in those days in Belconnen you could look 360 degrees around and not see a thing, nowadays there are houses all around the place. So the radio people having done their initial training of six months at Adelaide, having done their detailed technical training on the bigger transmitters and more powerful receivers at *Watson* went to Canberra, to *Harman* and Belconnen, for a further six weeks. At the end of that they were considered to be let loose on the naval world.

So I take it you were part of the radio crowd?

Part of the radio crowd, yes.

So what happened when you were released to the world?

Unfortunately for me I was assigned to stay at *Watson* as a Maintenance Engineer on the equipment there.

Why was that unfortunate?

I wanted to go to sea; some of the others went to sea, why couldn't I go to sea? But that was life.

Why? Were you able to ascertain as to why it was you were left on shore?

No, no correspondence will be entered into; the judge's word is final. It wasn't a question of ability.

So what did your job involve there at *Watson*?

Being the training establishment for the radio part of the business it had a whole range of transmitters that are used or were used in naval ships and naval shore establishment. Every type of transmitter that was in existence, there was one of those there, and the same for the receivers. It was also, it had the duel role of being a training establishment and the communications point for the Sydney region. So all the transmitted and received signals would come into *Watson* and then be relayed up to Garden Island where naval headquarters were. So *Watson* was the central technical point. So my job was one of the maintenance technicians there.

And what would be a typical day for you as a maintenance technician?

Occasionally there were breakdowns so you had to respond immediately to the breakdown and find out what had gone wrong and fix it. But there is very little in the way of preventative maintenance you can do in a piece of electronics equipment, even in those days. So it was a question of keeping abreast of developments and waiting for something to happen. And of course installing new equipment as it came, and discontinuing obsolete equipment as it became obsolete. It was an easy job; no time demands at all except when something went wrong, then all hell would break loose and you would have to fix it like yesterday.

So what happened after this four months at *Watson*?

No, the four months at *Watson* was training followed by six weeks at Canberra training and then back to *Watson* as part of what they called "the ship's company". I was no longer a trainee; I belonged to the ship HMAS *Watson*.

So how long were you?

I will have to refer to my notes.

That's okay.

Can I put my glasses on?

Yes.

About a year I was there and then I was had my wish granted and I was drafted to a ship. Drafted means posted. Not the sort of draft I wanted but at least it was a ship. And it was HMAS *Gladstone*. Now *Gladstone* was a corvette. Corvettes were very important during the war. About 60 of them were built in Australia and they were very important for minesweeping and escort duties used all over the Pacific war theatre. At the time I joined *Gladstone* she was one of the two training ships for HMAS *Cerberus*. So back to *Cerberus* but this time as a member of the crew of HMAS *Gladstone*. Now *Gladstone*'s job was to take recruits to school, to sea, and give them sea training. Recruits whether they were seaman recruits, whether they were leading mates, petty officers, doing coxswain qualification certificates. Training ships for officers, doing navigation courses, training ships for midshipmen giving them experience in ship handling, navigation. So from the point of view of taking the trainee and giving him live actual real experience at sea was a very important job. And once again I had very little to do because the communications equipment on a little ship like a corvette, is pretty simple. There was a couple of transmitter receivers on the bridge. There was the main transmitter and the main receiver in the wireless office so I had very little to do.

So what would you do?

Difficult to say now. I would help out on occasions with advice and guidance on some of the trainees, particularly when they got seasick. HMAS *Cerberus* is on the shores of Hans Inlet. Hans Inlet is a part of Westernport Bay.

Westernport Bay is adjacent to Port Phillip Bay. Hans Inlet is invariably flat calm. Westernport Bay can get a bit choppy. Bass Strait can be like a millpond today and be a raging storm tomorrow. No, to get from Hans Inlet through Westernport Bay to Bass Strait might take that ship three hours. And within three hours, lots of cocky young trainees would go from being smart Alec to heaving over the sides of the ship, and they needed a bit of support.

How would you support them?

Oh, just by comforting them, telling them that "it won't last for ever," and you know, those sort of things. Also ships in those days had a secret machine called the Typex. You've heard of the Enigma machine? Typex was the allied version of their Enigma machine, and I was the only one trained on Typex. That was part of the training at HMAS *Harman*. So I used to have a little bit of fun playing with Typex trying to understand it, and more importantly trying to beat it. You could never beat it though.

Can you go into a little bit more detail about your training in Typex involved?

Yes. Typex was an electro mechanical device, and before I forget it I think that my experience with that is a thing that has led me to be a fanatic about doing cryptic crossword puzzles. I love the *Sydney Morning Herald* cryptic crossword puzzles. About once every three months I can get one out. Typex was an electro mechanical device that had a series of little direct current motors in it; 24 volt motors in it and a series of wheels. Each wheel had on either side a series of brass contacts which were connected internally one to another by wires. Each wheel was different. Each wheel could be put in one of two ways. So you would put an electrical impulse in one end of the Typex, it would go through all these combinations of electrical connections and come out the other end. Now unless those electrical combinations were the same setting in the transmitting device as in the receiving device, nothing would come out of the receiver. So you could get a radio signal coming in, connect it to the Typex and providing that signal had been composed by the Typex at the sending end in the same precise manner as the Typex was composed in the receiving end, something would come out. So each wheel had to be the same, and the direction of each wheel had to be the same. And it wasn't as though there were just 12 wheels, there were about 30 wheels.

How new a technology was Typex?

In those days it was state of the art, it was something fantastic. But when you think about it conceptually it's a very simple system, like connecting a wire from here to there via a switch. That's very basically what it is. If the switch is on the electrical current will come through. If you've got two switches, both have to be on. If you have 50 switches, 50 have to be on.

Now you mentioned when you were on the corvette that you would try and beat the Typex. Can you explain that?

Yes, I would simulate a signal coming in and I would position the wheels in a certain format and then I would say to my self, "Okay, now what are the permutations and combinations of those wheel locations that are possible to get the signal through?" And what are the permutations and combinations where it is impossible. Now if you imagine that you have two wheels with 24 connections on it, 24 by 24 is a large number. If you have ten wheels, 24 by 24 by 24, that number is astronomical, but as with the Enigma machine the code was broken. I ha-

ven't got the faintest idea of how that code was broken. Now my concept was that if the code of Enigma could be broken then the code for Typex could be broken. I had an impossible task but I had fun trying.

You were trying to break the code.

Yeah, yeah.

George, whose was the prerogative to actually operate the Typex machine?

Exclusively the skipper because it was a device that was designed to encrypt messages, information such as the enemy or other persons couldn't have access to it. It was therefore a secret device and a very limited number of people had access to the use of it and who knew the coding for the particular day, and the time of the day the coding was changed. It wasn't always changed at mid-night. That was another factor in obfuscating the whole issue from others who might otherwise want access to it. As well as the number of wheels, the position of the wheels, the time of the day of the change was also important.

So it was always changed, so it was regularly changed in much in the same way that say a cipher code would be?

Exactly. So the skipper was the only person who really had access to that information.

What was you own responsibility with regard to the Typex?

In the event that it broke down. For example, one of the driving motors might burn out, a fuse might blow. Things like that. There had to be someone who had sufficient technology knowledge to fix the thing. Mechanically, electrically it was a fairly simple device.

How did you learn the maintenance of the machine?

When I was doing my training in HMAS *Harman* on the receiving equipment there. They devoted two days to a Typex. Here is the Typex, this is what it does, here's how you pull it apart, here are the things that are likely to go wrong with it, here are the spare parts that you will probably need, or the components, there it is. Fairly straightforward.

Good, thanks for that. Could you give us a description of the *Gladstone* as a corvette?

Gladstone was a corvette, a small warship. Incidentally all the war vessels are correctly termed warship, and then within that broad category you have battleships, heavy cruisers, light cruisers, destroyers, sloops, frigates, corvettes. So a corvette was one of them of a stable of warships. Small ships specifically designed for mine clearance, not necessarily mine laying, could be adapted for depth charging, but more generally used as escort for larger vessels and escort for convoys.

Now, can you tell us a bit about the skipper?

The skipper at the time was Lieutenant Commander Henry Cooper. Henry was one of the old school; very prim and proper and his word was law. I can remember one day we were in Hans Inlet. We had been charged with the responsibility of doing some chart updating as far as depths are concerned, and the method of doing it was by echo sounder plus by hand line for comparison and one of the officers; one of the junior officers had the name of Bennett. And Bennett was on the starboard wing of the bridge this particular day peering over the side and he kept saying, "Sir, I can see the bottom." "Bennett, everything is under control." "But sir, I can see the bottom." "Bennett, I am in command." The next

thing "crunch," we went aground. Fortunately the tide was on the ebb and probably about five hours later as the tide came in, we floated and went off. But Henry got into all sorts of strife with CSTFND, Commander Superintendent Training Flinders Naval Depot. He was the big boss of Flinders and of course the training ships came under his command. And poor old Henry was on the mat over that.

I bet he was. Now once your time had come to an end on the *Gladstone*, what happened next?

Well, at that time the fleet air arm had been announced as forming in Australia, and I'm talking about 1947, '48 now. They called for volunteers. Now its time honoured practice in the armed service that you never volunteer for anything. But I did, I volunteered, along with quite a lot of others and I was accepted as a successful entrant into the fleet air arm. A couple of months later in company with about 12 other radio mechanics we were aboard the P&O [Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company] liner, *Maloja*, heading for the United Kingdom as passengers, paid passengers. Fremantle, Colombo, Bombay, Aden, Suez, through the canal, Port Said, Marseille, in the south of France, Tilbury. From Tilbury then by train to Lancashire where we spent the next 13 months at HMS *Ariel* which was the Royal Navy's establishment for training electrical and radar technicians in airborne and air supported communications and radar equipment.

Just before we move onto this period of training, could you define for us what the fleet air arm was?

Fleet air arm, as it was proposed by the government, was initially to have the loan of a fleet aircraft carrier. Light fleet aircraft carriers were small carriers by comparison with some of the things that you see today. Anything up to about 20,000 tons. Subsequently, and while that was in process, HMAS *Sydney* as she was to become, was refitted in England and sailed to Australia to become the first aircraft carrier we had. In fact as we on the P&O liner were heading for England, at Port Said we passed *Sydney* heading south to Australia.

Did you realise what the ship was at that point?

Oh, yes, yes. And of course we shouted and cheered at our fellow sailors on the *Sydney*.

What was the purpose of you being sent to England for training? What sort of training were you being sent to England to do?

Training on aircraft, airborne radar and radio equipment and the special equipment that is shore based and ship based for supporting that. I will give you a couple of examples of the specialised equipment. One was known as the YE beacon. Now a YE beacon is ship-borne, a YG beacon is ashore, doesn't matter, it is the same sort of thing. And you have a directional aerial, like this screen behind us, flat, square and it rotates slowly through 360 degrees and in any one of about 12 sectors on the way it transmits a Morse code letter. In the first sector it might be "A". In the next sector it might be "S," and so on. So that an aircraft that is flying and is unsure where he is and switches on his ZBX receiver which is associated with the beacon and as the directional aerial faces him, he hears this code. He knows therefore which direction he needs to fly to get back to the aircraft; that's one device. Another device was known as the FV5. As I mentioned previously the frequency of operation of the communications VHF equipment was 100 to 160 megahertz. The FV5 was a much more sophisticated device. It had a circular radar screen and as the pilot spoke on his communications thing, maybe it was up to say 138.8 megacycles.

The FV5 would be tuned into that same frequency and on the circular screen from the centre a line would come out. That line would indicate the direction that the aircraft was, relative to where the FV5 was. So there are two different types of devices specifically for aircraft use that we were trained on. Then there were the normal things like HF and VHF communication. There was another special device called the AYF. Now the AYF had two di-pole aerials underneath the tail plate. An aeroplane has main plane and tail plane; tail plane is the little one. The AYF would send a signal to the ground by a transmitter. It would be reflected back to the other aerial and because of the time difference between transmission and reception, there would be a frequency difference because it was a frequency modulated signal. That frequency difference was then translated within the machine to indicate the height. And it was a very accurate thing because there were two ranges. Range one was zero to four hundred feet. The other was zero to four thousand feet. There was another one called an APX. This was part of a system known as IFF, Identification Friend or Foe. That would operate quite automatically unbeknown to the aircrew, and if you had in your aircraft or in your ship an APX transmitter it would send out a signal, it would be received by the aircraft and if it was a friendly aircraft the coding and the frequency would cause the transponder in the aircraft to reply automatically back to the originating signal. If they got no reply, this is an enemy, "Bang!" So those are the sorts of, sonar buoys too, we were trained on sonar buoys.

What were the sonar buoys?

Sonar buoys. They came in different versions as they were developed, but if you can imagine a cylinder, it's about this big, say about 9 inches in diameter. It's about less than a metre, 80 centimetres high. In the bottom of it, it has a microphone, more correctly known as a hydrophone, on the end of a long coil of wire. On the top it has an aerial. Six of them were fitted under the wings of the aircraft. The aircraft would go out and they would suspect that a submarine might be there somewhere so they would fly around in a big circle dropping a sonar buoy in a pattern. As the sonar buoy which was controlled by a parachute hit the water, the impact would open a switch, which would do three things. One, it would disconnect the aerial, two it would drop the microphone in the water to a depth of about 40 feet and three it would switch on the transmitter, so that if there was a submarine making submarine noises within the vicinity, like within say a kilometre or so, those noises would be picked up by the hydrophone, amplified, transmitted, sent back to the aircraft and the observer by understanding what the pattern was, what the frequencies were and so on, he could pin point where that initial noise came from. That's another example of airborne equipment.

Now I understand the IFF [Identification Friend or Foe] was operating during World War II but how many of these other technologies were post war developments?

Sonar buoy, I think, was a post war development or a latter post war development. The AYF was a war development. The radar, there were different types of radar. There was search radar; there was intercept radar. The sea venom had a crew of two sitting side by side, the pilot and the observer and the observer operated the radar, the search and intercept radar, and he could direct the pilot on to the target giving him range, bearing, azimuth.

What was the Sea Venom again?

Sea Venom was the first jet borne carrier aircraft.

The training you had been sent across to England for was part of your activities, or your intended activities as part of fleet air arm, I presume?

Yep.

Now you were training at HMS *Ariel*. What did that place consist of?

Interesting. Before the war it was one of Butlin's holiday camps, or a similar sort of thing. It was simply a collection of huts with a central cafeteria and galley and eating facility. It had a sport centre where we used to play badminton and basketball. In the middle of Lancashire. They were fascinating days.

What made them particularly fascinating?

It was at the time, this was back in 1948, '49, when England was still suffering extreme food shortages and we used to get food parcels sent over to us from home, and that made us very popular. I mean a small tin of ham like that, I mean you could take a girl out for whole week on that.

Do you mean you would give the ham to the girl or you would feed her during the expedition?

Another thing that made it fascinating was our first introduction to rum. Rum had been part of the British Navy for hundreds of years, but not the Australian Navy. Now this rum is something that since I have never tasted anything like. It was ambrosia, it was liquid gold, it was all sorts of things, quite fascinating.

Are these your subjective judgements or are these the categories of rum?

No, my subjective judgements.

I take it from that you actually enjoyed it?

Oh yes, absolutely. Now if you were of the rank of ordinary seaman, able seaman or leading seaman you had to take your rum diluted with water, one part of rum two parts of water. Which was still tasty but it wasn't rum. Once you got to the exultant elevated post of petty officer, which we were at that stage, you could have your rum neat. Another thing, when they dished out the rum to the sailors, the master at arms, which is the chief naval policeman, would stand there and make sure that they drank it. One seaman come forward and hold out his mug or cup or glass and it would be dished out and he had to drink it, straight down like that, couldn't take it away, had to drink it straight down.

Why weren't they allowed to take it away?

Because they might store it then drink it and get drunk you see. Petty officers and chief petty officers were trustworthy persons. Nevertheless we used to store ours and you could take three or four days rum in a little bottle and go ashore to the local pub, which was probably at least 250 yards down the road. For a shilling, mind you, you could buy a pint of beer and you could sit there all night, and for three or four shillings have three pints of beer and your rum and it was a marvellous, very cheap, very wonderful way to get drunk.

How was it you were able to store yours up?

Because we were trusted as petty officers. The ordinary sailor couldn't be trusted but the non commissioned officer—petty officer and chief petty officer—could be trusted in theory, but he wasn't of course.

Now, what was your own response to the training?

Was it arduous, was it enjoyable, how did you feel about it?

I thought it was protracted. We were there for 13 months and I really thought that if they'd put a little bit of pressure on we could have done it in six or eight months. Yes there was a lot to learn but even so. But the good part about that was that we had lots of opportunity to do sightseeing. I had a couple of leaves in London. I palled up with; well two of us palled up with a Scots fellow who was also on the course with us; Andrew McKay. He came from Glasgow, he took us home. Then the three of us toured all around Scotland visiting his sister in the far north, and that was another interesting little experience of Scots hospitality. We went to a ceilidh [pronounced kaylee] on this particular night, and it was absolutely marvellous, shouting and dancing and drinking scotch whisky, a wonderful time.

I'm not familiar with that term ceilidh. What actually is, or was, a ceilidh?

It's an indigenous word for a wonderful party, with dancing. All very innocent, not like you might find these days.

But with an emphasis on traditional Scottish dancing?

Exactly yes, there were pipers, there were the girls doing all this sort of business and there was the Scottish country dancing, which I find, is absolutely wonderful to watch.

There are still people who are totally into that?

Oh yes, so I believe.

So its not that far removed from present day experiences?

No, and it will probably be like that in another hundred years. It's traditional. Anyway on this particular night, it was a cold night, it was in the middle of winter and they said when I went to bed, "We'll keep you warm, we'll give you a hot water bag." So they gave me a hot water bag, the traditional rubber thing with the steel thing. In the morning I woke up and I thought, "There's something wrong here, I don't know what it is." And I got up and went to get dressed and on the instep of my left leg was a blister and it was the size of a big pigeon's egg. Now that had come from being burnt by the steel top on the rubber hot water bag. That shows you the power of Scotch whisky. I didn't feel a thing.

Must have hurt.

But they were marvellous people, real hospitality, friendly, couldn't do enough for you.

You made a brief reference a few moments ago to the shortages in post war Britain. What other signs were there of a Britain that was clearly suffering a bit in the late 1940s, in terms of shortages, in terms of maybe cleaning up the rubble and whatever else was happening at that time?

Most of the rubble itself had been cleaned up by that time but there was still vast treks of land where a building had once stood and had all been cleared away. Transport around the country was by train, which was an excellent service; trains were always packed. Or local service around the city and into cities was by bus, also very strongly patronised and used. Motor vehicles, very few. I hitchhiked once from Warrington where I was, to Liverpool, and I had three hitchers on the way, no trouble getting those. Anyone in uniform they'd stop for. But there were very few private motor vehicles on the road. Not like nowadays. So shortage of private motor vehicle, cost of food. I was horrified the first time I went to London to see fruit that had come from Spain. Pineapples and grapes. And the price they were asking for those was

probably about three or four day's wages for the average Englishman.

Sounds like they were really up against it at that time?

Oh they were, yes. Yes and you would be lucky enough to be invited to someone's place for tea and as a special treat, because you were a visitor, they would put on something like spam and three vegetables. Mashed potato, baked potato, boiled potato.

I would imagine this was quite a contrast to post war Australia at that time?

Oh yes, by comparison, although we did have food rationing here during the war, it was nothing. I mean we had butter, "Butter, what's butter?" in England. Things have changed dramatically since but in those days it was tough for them.

Now I think you said that you went over there with several people from the RAN [Royal Australian Navy]. How many people did you travel over there with, who also did the courses with you?

There were three courses. I was in the first course, probably no more than ten. I've got records of it somewhere. The second course, there were fewer. There were probably about six. In the third course there were a few more. In all, less than 30 of us went to England for those 13 months training.

Were there any Australians among this group whom you became quite friendly with.

Oh yes, quite a number of them. In fact they are part, those who are still alive, are part of this naval association which I started 12 years ago. Interestingly one of them ended up a commodore. Two of them ended up as captains, a couple of commanders, lieutenant commanders. Some stayed as petty officers and chief petty officers.

Which among these people were you best mates would you say?

Probably sounds factualist to say it, but probably all of them. We got along exceedingly well, possibly because we travelled in the ship together as passengers, and that was fun. Because we were a group of Australians, a small group of Australians in the midst of thousands of English people. Again it's interesting how attitudes change. We wanted to be different. We wanted to show that we were Australians. So we commissioned a local fellow to make up shoulder patches with "Australia" on. And we sewed these on our uniform. We were told to take them off and we said, "No, we're Australians." The next thing we had a visit from the naval attaché at Australia House in London. "I'm ordering you to take those off." "But we're Australians." "Take them off, you are navy." We took them off. Nowadays Australia.

I wanted to explore a little more while we were on the subject your notion and obviously your mate's notion of pride in Australia. Could you explain to me what Australia at that time meant for you?

What it meant for me. Being self critical it could easily have been said of us, at the time, that we were loud-mouthed braggarts. "You English are funny doing that; we don't do that in Australia." "We have that in Australia but it's better that yours." That's a bit of an exaggeration but that was the attitude. Again using the word I used before, chauvinistic. Fiercely loyal to Australia.

Where did that come from do you think? What gave rise to that in the first place?

I think the reaction against the well-known English upper class, which still exists today, attitude to inferior beings.

We've heard other servicemen talk about being absolutely infuriated by the English referring to them as "colonials". Did you ever strike that?

Yes, yes. The word colonial didn't in itself, didn't adversely affect me, but the implications behind it. "You are second class citizens." We can call you a colonial or we can call you a "ticket of leave man", or whatever else. Whatever we call you doesn't matter, it's what is behind the meaning, behind what we are calling you. You are not up to our standard and I think it was that that caused this reaction. It was there right from the very start.

Was there a notion, at that time, of the Australian cultural cringe?

I hadn't heard that expression at that time. It was some years later that I heard it.

It was very interesting I mean there was an Australian film made in the late '30s called It Isn't Done where an Australian sheep farmer wins a baronial title and then has to go and prove himself. I just wondered to what extent, whether your attitude in England was one of wanting to prove yourself and also to represent Australia?

I don't know that we wanted to prove ourselves. I think we wanted to hit back. We saw the attitude as offensive. And how do you hit back in those circumstances? Use your tongue.

And did you genuinely believe that the Australian virtues and values and skills that you were championing were better than those of the English?

Oh yes, yes.

It was an innate belief?

Whether they were in fact or not I don't know, but we certainly believed that.

Was there a particular instance of being snubbed or being the victim of snobbery among the British that you can call to mind. Was there anything that symbolised or crystallised what you are talking about?

I can't think of any specific incident. But going back to this fellow who came from Australia House to tell us to take the shoulder patches off. I think he desperately wanted to be British. He was acting like an English naval officer. To an extent, arrogant, to an extent dismissive, to an extent overbearing. That would have been one instance I think.

I think that there is that expression "More English than the English". Which still applies to a few people. Now I gather a few of your mates got married around this time?

Yes, at that stage, immediate post war there was still a lot of women in the British armed services and the WRENS, Women's Royal Naval Service. There was as many of them in our camps as there were men. In fact quite a number of them trained as radio and radar mechanics. And to many of our fellows they were nothing short of beautiful. They were the pale English complexion and the cultured voice. And they succumbed to the feminine charms and married.

Was this a prospect for you at this time, in England?

Like most young men I fell in and out of love like every six weeks, but no, I wasn't serious. I was too young. I was only 21 at the time.

I imagine that you would have gone out with one or two of these WRENS.

Yes. And a good night out was to get a party of three or four girls and three or four fellows together. Go to

the local pub. Singing at the pub was very popular, darts competitions was very popular. So you could have a really good evening at the pub drinking the cheap beer, having your tot of rum, playing darts, singing songs, it was good.

Was there anyone among these girls that you came close to wanting to propose to?

No.

Had you met Shirley back in Australia at this time?

No.

That was later on. At the end of this training what happened to you?

We all then returned to Australia, once again as passengers on another P&O liner called *Ranchi*. From there, some home leave then drafted to HMAS *Albatross* at Nowra, then stationed there. Some of us went into squadrons immediately. Some, like myself, were appointed to positions of maintenance at the air station itself. Once again I was disappointed. I got an air station job along with some of the others, but some of them of course went to the squadrons and became associated directly with the aircraft.

What were your duties in this case?

There were two workshops in particular. The air wireless workshop and the air radar workshop where equipment that was carried in aircraft was maintained and repaired. I was one of the three appointed to the air radar workshop.

And this is at *Albatross*?

This is at *Albatross*.

Which I believe was near Nowra?

Yes, it's near Nowra.

What did *Albatross* consist of at that time?

Well *Albatross* had been not known as *Albatross* but it had been there since during the war. It had two airstrips. It had a control tower and a motley collection of wooden huts. Nowadays it's a highly sophisticated technical place. It still has the two airstrips but it has substantial concrete and steel hangars. Substantial buildings, all sorts of technical aids and assistance, but back in those days when it rained you ploughed through the mud to get from one building to another. There were, I think, three squadrons of aircraft there at that time, and not much else.

Doesn't sound like a wildly exciting place at the time?

It wasn't. About 12 kilometres from the village, at the time, of Nowra. Very little in the way of infrastructure to support the married personnel. One of my mates who subsequently became a lieutenant commander lived with his new bride in a garage that had been fitted out with a bed and a wash basin. Three others lived with their respective wives in a place that was named St Eneda, which was a Cornish name. It was a boarding house and they had the luxury of a bedroom each with shared bathroom and shared eating facilities. Another couple lived in a fisherman's hut out at Greenwell Point. Shirley and I, when we eventually married, and this was a couple of years later, lived in a variety of crummy little dumps in Huskisson. You see in those days there was nothing else. Immediately post war, nothing had happened during the war in the way of facilities for families or married people, so you just had to do the best with what you could find.

I got the impression that after World War II there were changes to the RAN, but it doesn't sound like it, at least when it came to providing essential housing facilities there weren't.

Eventually it came, by 1955, about then *Albatross* had an associated village next door, called married quarters. And you know what a Nissen hut is? The navy bought perhaps 40 or 50 of these Nissen huts. Installed them. They had the luxury of a sewerage system. They had the luxury of electricity and they had the luxury of running water. And these were made of available to anyone and everyone regardless of rank. Except the Captain. The captain had his own residence, which was a substantial residence. But everyone else who lived in married quarters lived in a Nissen hut.

What were some of the other main changes to the RAN in the post war decade?

For me personally, and this gets to the reason why I quit the service, one was promotion on the basis of merit. The other one was discontinuance of allowing alcohol on ships at sea. Those were the two main things.

And I gather these things figure later in your story?

Yes.

We'll come to those a little later then. Now at what point did you meet Shirley?

Just prior to, and I'm jumping ahead now. I was on the coronation contingent and just prior to that …

How did you come to meet Shirley?

Well my father, who I mentioned previously I think, had married again and they had a small boy and they were living in Guildford, a suburb of Sydney. I would visit them occasionally from *Albatross*. And on one particular occasion they told me about a terrible thing that had happened to a neighbour who lived in the street behind. He was driving home in his car to do a right hand turn into his street facing directly into the sunlight in the west. As he turned a young fellow came hooting down the road on the correct side, but straight into the car, which was a big old Chrysler weighing about 13 hundredweight, flew over the top and was killed.

Sorry, who flew over the top?

The young motorbike driver. As a consequence, the fellow driving the car had suffered a traumatic experience and they knew who this fellow was, and he was a neighbour. So I went around there one day when I heard this, to offer my sympathies and he happened to be Shirley's father, and that's how it happened. The girl next door almost.

When was that? How long after you came back to Australia?

Oh, that was a couple of years after, it was about 1952.

And how long after that were you married?

We were married on, well it was two marriages. We had a registry office marriage on the 16th of October 1953, almost 50 years to the day. And we decided that we would do that because being married, the navy provides marriage allowance, money. And as I was about to go to Korea and I would be away for about six months, then six months of marriage allowance would be a nice little nest egg to have. So straight into the registry office, married, off to Korea, but the marriage allowance was paid. And then when we came back from Korea in 1954, we had a proper wedding.

It sounds like you were planning the proper wedding?

Oh, absolutely, yes. No question, we had made up our mind.

Now, for how long did you actually remain based at *Albatross*?

I had a couple of sessions there. I went, after I had been at *Albatross* a while, I'm not sure if I've got this sequence correct. I think I have. I was sent to Flinders again, this time as an instructor teaching basic and advanced radio and radar technology. Became the responsibility of Flinders Naval Depot, taken away from *Torrens* which was disbanded and they needed instructors, so I was one of those, so I had about 12 months in Melbourne as an instructor in the equipment. And it was about that time that they called for volunteers again, for the coronation contingent. I think the whole navy applied and something like 30 naval people was accepted and I was one of the lucky ones.

Could you define for me what the coronation contingent was?

Yes, the coronation contingents, plural, were representatives of all of the British Commonwealth, of nations who supported Britain during World War II. It was to coincide with Queen Elizabeth's coronation on the 2nd of June 1953, and each contingent was made up of components of the armed forces. Papua New Guinea had a component of the special constabulary. Australia had a component of the Royal Australian Navy, Royal Australian Airforce, AIF [Australian Imperial Force], for example. South Africa a similar sort of thing, Canada that sort of thing. And these were the people who did the march through London on coronation day.

And I believe you had quite a memorable trip over there?

I have never experienced anything so amazing. Paid to travel around the world. We left Sydney, our first port of call was Aden. We skipped Colombo and Bombay, the traditional ports of P&O. From Aden up the Red Sea to Suez, through the Suez Canal, Port Said and then to Tobruk and we had a very moving ceremony, Last Post and all that sort of thing at the Tobruk war memorial. From there to Malta and had a few days in the grand harbour in Malta, and that was my first experience of red wine; Chianti. I had never tasted wine before and I've never tasted beer since, I don't think. Love it. From Malta to Gibraltar, and from Gibraltar to Portsmouth and then we went through all the coronation type activities.

Well just before we get to the coronation activities I believe that the dropping in at Tobruk involved a trip to a war cemetery.

Yes.

Can you talk more about that?

Yes, the war memorial at Tobruk.

That was the Australian War Memorial?

Australian War Memorial at Tobruk. I've visited quite a number of war memorials around the world and I am continually gratified by the condition in which they are kept. The Australian War Graves Commission which is part of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission does an absolutely outstanding job. All the tombstones are neat. The gardens that surround are neat. Everything is clean. Not a scrap of graffiti anywhere. I don't know what it costs, but whatever it costs its wonderful. That trip we did recently into the Somme Valley. That was a real eye opener. Michelin maps have produced a map which has been overprinted by the Australian War Graves Commission, and you look at this map and there are quite literally hundreds of red spots which you think are graves, they're not, they are cemeteries. And some of those cemeteries are small, three or four hundred graves, some are huge, thousands of graves. I know I'm digressing but I find this fascinating. One of the aston-

ishing ones is in a place called Tincourt, which is in the Somme Valley. And Tincourt has something like 120,000 names of soldiers who were killed in World War I and get this, whose bodies have never been found, 120,000. Tincourt.

It's quite a sobering number actually. It's a very sobering number of undiscovered bodies.

Absolutely yes.

Now was there a special ceremony there, at Tobruk.

Yes, yes. We took a bugler with us and we had a Roman Catholic and an Anglican chaplain aboard with us and they came and they spoke. There was a guard of honour and being the RAF, of course, they provided the rifles. And yes, it was a very moving ceremony. But the war grave itself is stark compared with some of them. The one at Port Moresby for example and the one at Broome are lush trees, green grass, flowers. Tobruk, not a blade of grass anywhere. Stark, very moving.

So it is moving and effective due to its starkness?

Yes

Tell us about the coronation activities themselves as far as you were concerned?

Yes, well we stayed aboard *Sydney* for a few days. We arrived in Portsmouth probably about 10 days prior to the coronation, stayed aboard *Sydney*, and each day we would march up and down the flight deck and on the wharf because the march through London was going to be about seven or eight miles, and you are carrying a rifle on your shoulder and you can't take it off for that whole distance, so we were pretty fit by the time we moved to England, to London, and we were billeted in Earl's Court. I'm sure you've heard of Earl's Court. On the day of the coronation along with everyone else, we were moved into our assigned position and at the appropriate time we marched off. Now it was an unfortunate situation for two reasons. One, there was drizzling rain, so we were soaked to the skin by the time we finished. That wasn't so bad. But the unfortunate thing from our perspective was we were midway between two bands and at no stage was the whole Australian contingent in step. And that must have looked awful.

So half of you were marching to one beat and the other half were marching to the other.

That's right yeah. So we marched through London and then at the end disbanded and went back to Earl's Court and went out that night with about 17,000 million other people and celebrated.

Seems to have been quite a year and time actually?

Oh, absolutely yes. I don't think I've ever seen so many people concentrated in one place in my whole life. But the next day was good, that was June the 3rd. We were assigned a Ghurkha [Nepalese troops in British service] pipe band specifically for us and we marched from Earl's Court to the palace grounds where we assembled with all the contingents from all the other countries. The Queen came out and made a speech and then she commissioned a number of ushers who were army officers, to walk around and present each one of us with the coronation medal. And from there with the Ghurkha band we marched back through the streets of London, people cheering, to Earl's Court. We stayed at Earl's Court then for about three days I suppose, and that was an opportunity to do a bit more sightseeing. And from there we moved to a guard's camp in Surrey, place called Pirbright. And this was another interesting experience. We got there in the afternoon, hot and bothered. "Let's have

a shower, fellas." No hot water. All cold water, so we complained. "What's wrong with you sissies?" "British Army. Cold showers." "All right," so the next morning cold shower, it was awful. And then a couple of us then went up to the galley and said, "Can we have some hot water for a shave, in the mugs?" "Shave in cold water. The British army shaves in cold water." "Can we have a cup of tea?" "Yeah, mate plenty of tea over there, help yourself." Poured a cup of tea, went back to the bathrooms and shaved in the cup of tea. Beat them.

You had to get them somehow? Sounds like you did.

So from there, fortunately, we were only there one night then back to the ship in Portsmouth and the next day after that was Spithead Review. Spithead Review has been held twice, three times in the 20th century. Elizabeth, George before her, George the fifth, not George the sixth and Edward the seventh. And Spithead Review is held in the Solent, the sea between the Isle of Wight and Portsmouth and all the ships of the British Navy and the visiting navy's all line up in anchor and then the Queen or the King in the royal yacht moves up and down in between the rows of ships and everyone salutes and throws their caps in the air. And as far as the eye could see except for land, Isle of Wight, and the mainland of England, as far as you could see, ships, warships. Quite astonishing. The next day we left England and sailed west.

That sounds quite a highlight?

Oh, absolutely.

I expect that you still look back upon that with the visions and the memories of what you saw quite strongly.

Yes, an astonishing thing. Happens to so few people in a lifetime.

When you sailed west what happened then?

We headed for Halifax, Nova Scotia. A good will visit to Canada. My lasting memory of Halifax is housewives. All the houses in the inner city area are built right on the street and you walk right out the front door, down a couple of stone steps and you are on the footpath. And my lasting memory, quite literally, dozens and dozens of Canadian housewives out on their hands and knees scrubbing the stone steps. Amazing.

Sounds like something of a movie?

Yes, and we were entertained there by the Canadian Navy. Taken out to a Canadian transmitting station. We spent five minutes inspecting the equipment and the next five hours drinking beer. From there we sailed south to Baltimore, which is the port for Washington and New York. We were given a guided tour of the Washington environs, the Arlington Cemetery, the Washington Memorial , the Lincoln Memorial, we were entertained at the Australian Embassy in Washington by the Ambassador who at that time was Sir Percy Spender. And he had thoughtfully recruited two lots of people. One, all the good-looking young secretaries he could find and the good services of the local beer suppliers. And that was wonderful. They thought we looked marvellous because we were all dressed in our white uniforms. It was summertime of course, June.

I understand that at a certain point of the trip and it may well have been in London you appeared in a newsreel?

Oh, no, no. That was later on when I was in Korea. Shirley was at the movies with some friends and as one of the preludes, the main feature they'd put on some newsreel items and one of them was a retrospect thing,

looking back on the past. And this feature was on the coronation and apparently the camera had focused on the naval component of the Australian contingent and I marched, apparently, right across the screen and the whole theatre knew. "It's George, it's George!"

That's fantastic. I mean what are the odds against something like that.

So from Halifax to Baltimore. From Baltimore then south again to Kingston, Jamaica. The Jamaican people welcomed us with opened arms. I understand that today Jamaica is in a state of political turmoil and that there are street gangs and there are murders. In those days it was almost utopia. Very friendly, big beaming smiles, poor as church mice, but lovely people. From there across the Caribbean to the Panama canal. There was a US naval depot called Pensacola, and once again we were entertained, this time by the United States Navy and then we went through the Panama Canal. Now that experience was quite different from the Suez. I don't know if you've been through either canal but the Suez canal, the land either side is to all intents and purposes flat. Sand, occasional small villages and in the centre around a town called Al-Ismailiyah there are some salt water lakes, but very uninspiring un-touristy looking place. The Panama Canal, vastly different. Mountains either side. You go up over the mountain and then down again through a series of water locks. Prior to the trip away if you can imagine an aircraft carrier with gun sponsons on either side they cut off about almost a metre of gun sponsons, on both sides of the ship and then bolted them back on again. When we got to Panama, to Pensacola rather, on the Atlantic side of the Panama Canal, they unbolted these pieces, put them inboard so that we could fit into the canal locks. And I'm not exaggerating when I say the space between the cut edge of the sponsons on both sides and the stone walls of the locks was no more than about a foot.

What was the vessel you were aboard at this time?

Sydney.

It was the HMAS *Sydney*, the aircraft carrier, which obviously didn't leave much room in those locks?

No. So all these aircraft carriers the yanks have, none of them would go anywhere near fitting through the Panama Canal. So they've got to have literally two navies; one on the east coast and one on the west because the only other way is around Cape Horn.

Cape Horn, which of course is pretty storm ridden. So you got through the Panama Canal and then obviously headed across the Pacific?

Yes, to a little place called Hawaii. And that also was interesting. We were given entrée to what the American's call their PX stores. I'm not quite sure was PX means but it's the store where American armed personnel and their families can go and buy things. Food, clothes. The Australian dollar at that stage was worth more than the American dollar. Something like a dollar 20, although we didn't have Australian dollars in that time. You understand what I mean?

Yes, you are talking about pounds at that time?

Yes, ten shillings Australian. The equivalent of a dollar today was worth more than the American dollar. Now, for one American dollar we could buy three cans of cold beer and a hamburger and have ten cents change. Do you like that?

That's pretty good.

So, we saw a little bit of Hawaii, swam at Waikiki beach which was a disappointment. Gaped and gawked at Diamond head, but it was pleasant. Saw the aftermath of the Pearl Harbour bombing. At that stage I don't think they had built a museum over the ship that was sunk. The museum that exists there today. It's an interesting place the island of Oahu. There is another island called Hawaii, the big island, and that again is quite different. But Oahu today, in my opinion having been there fairly recently, is economically depressed and if it wasn't for the United States Navy I think they would be in dire straits.

Now as you travelled back from England were there any other ceremonies or commemorative things that you were taking part in?

Yes, after Hawaii, we went to Auckland, to, you see we had the New Zealand contingent aboard with us too. At Auckland there was a civic reception. The main street of Auckland leads up the hill to the town hall from the wharf. So we assembled at the wharf and then with the band playing, marched up the hill to the town hall where there was a civic reception. And that was good fun too. Dancing and singing and eating. But that was the last official function. When we got back to Sydney there was no function at all. Everyone was glad to get home. But one of the interesting things for me, and there were many interesting things. But one was that on board with us there was something like six VC [Victoria Cross] winners and three George Cross winners. Four George Cross winners. The four George Cross winners were Australians and five of the six VC winners were Australian. The other one was Jack Hinton from New Zealand.

Which of those award winners stands out in your memory?

I guess Frank Partridge for a number of reasons. He was a quiet unassuming sort of a fellow. I don't know how they could have done it, when I say they, I mean the officers aboard. In order to keep the army and the air force occupied while we were at sea, they gave them tasks to do like sweeping and cleaning. Now I remember one day I was about the walk down a steel ladder, stairway, between two decks and Frank Partridge was at the bottom with a scraper and a chipping hammer in his hand scraping rust off the ladder and I thought, "Here is a man who has achieved that outstanding award and yet these bastards in the officer class have got him doing that menial task."

I was going to say, these were national treasures who were being made to do absolutely menial tasks.

Just to keep them occupied. Instead of organising lectures, showing them films.

Or having them talk and share some of their experiences.

Yes, exactly.

So they were all being expected to do these kinds of chores?

Yes.

That's appalling.

It was probably only three or four hours a day, to keep them occupied.

Even so. Not good. So Partridge impressed you. What was it about Partridge that impressed you?

His mild and meek manner. He was a man who confronted the Japanese. Killed them in cold blood, and yet to talk to him it was like talking with the postman. Entirely different sort of person, as though it was two people.

Very knowledgeable, very intelligent. I don't know if you remember he was successful as a radio quiz personality.

Of course, on Bob Dyer's Pick a Box.

Exactly, yes.

Frank Partridge and Barry Jones.

Yes. I could warm to the VC winners because they were all non-commissioned people; sergeants, privates and so on. I couldn't warm to the George Cross winners because all of them were officers.

What was it about them? Was it the fact that they were officers or was it something about them personally?

It was the fact that at that time there were two classes of people in all the services. The officers and the others. Things are vastly different now. And they were part of that system.

Are we saying that the officers were behaving like officers and putting on a bit of front?

Absolutely, yes. You would talk with them, they would respond. They would polite, they would be remote. They would not initiate a discussion and as soon as was decently apparent they would terminate the association.

That's not my experience of army people or naval people?

Yes, but you're a generation removed from me.

I met some SAS [Special Air Service] people in Western Australia a couple of years ago and there was absolutely no front, no attitude whatsoever.

Well, I've just come from Nowra and on a number of occasions in the last five years I've come up against, I've met socially the commanding officers of the various units down there including the captains, different captains at different times. There all friendly, "Hello, George, how are you, good to see you," that sort of thing. It's quite different these days from what it was then.

So you got back to Australia, did you then return to *Albatross*?

Return to *Albatross*, yes. Now, by this stage then I had married Shirley; we lived in married quarters for a while which was very comfortable and then we lived in Huskisson in these different little, crummy little places and decided that we would build our own home. At that stage Shoalhaven Shire had land that they wanted occupied in Huskisson. And this was crown land and they advertised it to be available to those who wanted it, to build a house. So I applied and I was allocated a 99 year lease of a suburban block of land to build a house. And that was going to cost me four pounds ten shillings a year, for the next 99 years. And we built our own house, and when I say we built it, we did. We dug the foundations, we mixed the concrete for the footings, we laid the bricks, we bought the timber, we nailed it together, we erected the frame, we got the fibro cement sheet and Shirley held it while I nailed it. I got up on the roof and she passed the corrugated iron up to me and we moved into the house. We had three glass windows and four other windows that were covered with tarred paper. We had a slow combustion stove which provided the cooking and the heating in the winter and the hot water. We had no electricity and the toilet was a WC down the back yard. But it was "ours", and that's where we started.

Sounds pretty good. It must have felt pretty good to have invested so much of your own energy into it and to know that it was yours actually?

Yes.

During this period were you going to sea at all?

Yes, that was one of the factors that contributed to me resigning ultimately, but coming back a bit. Having been at Nowra, *Albatross* again, for a little while I had been in the rank of petty officer, for almost six years. I got a very early promotion. I was a petty officer at the age of 20. Typically they are 28 these days. But I had been in the position for six years. Now the next rung up at that time was chief petty officer. So I said to my boss, "Eh, isn't it about time I was a chief?" He said, "Probably, I'll look into it." He came back to me a few days later and he said, "I've got some bad news for you." "We have now what is known as establishments in the service and the establishment says that we have "X" number of chief petty officers, and there are a number of others who in terms of seniority in your rank, they are ahead of you, and I've done some calculations and if you stay your full term of 12 years until age 30, you'll never make chief." I thought, "Well, that's great." But he said, "I've got some good news for you," "we're short of officers, would you like to be an officer?", and I said, "Not particularly." He said, "It pays well, and you're married and you could do with the money, can't you?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "All right, there are some exams to pass. I'll help you." So within six weeks I'd sat the exams and I'd passed them and I was made a sub-lieutenant. So I was an officer and then I started to see things from a different perspective. I started to see things that the lower deck doesn't see; behaviour of officers. Some of them behaved like gentlemen, some of them behaved like professionals. Many of them did not. Things like getting drunk at lunchtime and going to bed for the afternoon. At sea, things like getting drunk. Now this was when I quit the service; this was two years prior to the Voyager accident and you will have heard about the alleged drunken Duncan, the captain of the *Voyager*.

Captain Stevens.

Duncan Stevens, yeah. No relation to me. But that was one of the factors contributing to me deciding I didn't want to be part of this navy any more. There were arrogant officers. There were officers who were getting drunk regularly, and another thing that got up my nose was this promotion on the basis of time in the job. We had appointed to *Albatross* a deputy electrical officer. The electrical officer was responsible for everything electrical on the station. Power distribution, emergency lighting, air field lighting, radio communication, radar installations, the whole box and dice. And he had a deputy appointed, and that deputy was a good man. He left for another job in the navy office and they appointed another one. Now this guy who I will simply call big Bill Rayman, the electrical officer, introduced Harry to me. And he said, "George, I want you to take Commander Harry around and show him all your installations you are responsible for." So it took him to the control tower and showed him what happens there, and then I went out to a place they called GCI: the Ground Control Interception. This is the low frequency, very high power intercept radar. And I started to explain this to Harry and Harry interrupted me and he said, "Look George, all this crap's beyond me. I just don't understand it. Lets go back." Now I thought, "Now here's a man who is the deputy electrical officer, my superior. He hasn't the faintest idea about what I do. He's been promoted simply because he has been in the job longer than other people. And that really got up my nose. So there were three things. One, promotion on the basis of time, not ability. Two, this drunkenness business. Three, I worked out that if I stayed in the navy and retired at age 55 then I would

be away from my family for a total of six years. You see, when our son Matthew was born I was in the Philippines and he was almost three months old before I saw him. So those three things together said I don't want any part of this navy any more. It's not what I thought it would be. So I said I was going to resign. And everyone said to me, "You can't resign, naval officers don't resign." I said, "You watch me." And I did. And I got out, and that's when the hard work started.

When did you get out?

It was very early in 1961.

Prior to that, of course, had come the Korean War?

Yes.

Now how aware were you of the Korean War before you got involved in it?

Oh, quite aware because when I joined *Sydney* for the coronation contingent, she'd just come back from a term in Korea and at the time of the coronation hostilities were still in place. They were still in place until late July, I think. So when we came back from the coronation, people were dispersed all over the place and because I happened to be on *Sydney* I was appointed as the petty officer in charge of the air radar workshop. I had responsibility for all the maintenance of the air raid equipment and the Fireflies and Sea Furies at the time. Piston engine aircraft. So I happened to be on *Sydney* when she made her next trip to Korea. That was about eight months later we came back from Korea.

Now I gather you arrived in Korea just as the Armistice was signed?

That's right. The armistice was signed sometime in August I think it was and I got there about eight weeks later. So hostilities had ceased but to all intents and purposes everything was still on a war footing. Reconnaissance aircraft were flying each day. Troops were going through all their practices. We, in *Sydney*, were based at a town called Kure, which is only a few miles from Hiroshima. It's a port, a port on the inland sea. Inland sea is absolutely beautiful, pictorially beautiful. High mountains, trees, lots of islands, lovely. And our routine was to replenish at Kure and then sail west through the inland sea through a very narrow strait between the main island of Hokkaido [actually Honshu] and Kyushu to the south, through the straits of Shimonoseki. Across the Korean strait into the Yellow Sea which is to the east of mainland China and to the west of the Korean Peninsula. We would then steam slowly backwards and forwards up and down the Yellow Sea for perhaps three weeks. Each day we would launch aircraft who would do reconnaissance. And then when we ran out of fuel and supplies back to Kure for replenishment. At the time I got there Shirley wrote me a letter and she said that she had a friend from the surfing days, Peter Blackford, who joined the army and who had been wounded in the front line in Korea just prior to me getting there. He was in hospital in Kure so I went to see him. I'll never forget the stark atmosphere of that hospital. You walk into a hospital ward and there are white sheets and there is flowers and there is music and there is banter going on. In this hospital it was, and when I say stark, I mean stark. It was quiet, the lights were dim because the ward was full of seriously injured people. Peter spoke with me for perhaps half an hour and then I could see that he was quite uncomfortable so I left. Now what had happened was, just before I got there Peter was in the front line in Korea.

Okay, so George if we can continue this story about your visit to the hospital to see your friend Peter.

Yes, and I was just thinking it's different these days, thinking about what happened in Bali recently it's different these days from then. The story of Peter is that he was in the front line as an infantry man and it was planned that there would be an attack made on the North Korean positions and the coordinated attack was to be supported by artillery fire from behind the lines. And the artillery was under the command of the Canadian Army. There was dreadful miscommunication and instead of the Canadians shelling the North Koreans they shelled the Australian position in the front line, killing a number of Peter's mates in his unit, and injuring some, one of who was Peter. This is euphemistically called "friendly fire" these days. Some friend. Peter suffered a very nasty leg wound to his right leg, above his knee. For some weeks the surgeons were trying to save his leg by pinning the shattered fragments of bone together and hoping that by treatment with antibiotics like penicillin, that the wound would heal. But just a matter of days after I saw Peter they decided that this was impossible and they amputated his leg as a consequence. And I was thinking about this the other day. Had that sort of thing happened today, as with Bali, they would have put Peter in an aircraft, flown him back here to Australia where there was immediate, and high quality, and high availability of medical and surgical service that would be available. But in those days it just didn't happen at all. So Peter was unfortunate and he lost his leg. But those sorts of things do happen in war. I've never been so cold in all my life as I was in Korea. It was the middle of winter. This was Christmas of 1953 and we were issued with long john underwear. Now I don't know if you've ever seen pictures of your great grandfather in his passion killing underwear. Neck to knee, full arms, full legs, button up down the front. There was absolutely no way I was going to wear this stuff, until I got to the cold of Korea and then even Marilyn Monroe couldn't have got it off me.

So you were talking about how Marilyn Monroe wouldn't be able to get your passion killers off you.

Yeah, it was so cold. But surprisingly at one stage we were invited ashore at Incheon, which is the port of Seoul, by the army there. There was a Maori concert party giving a concert and would we like to go and see the concert. So we said, "Yes." This was in a big tent and I'm sure the temperature was at freezing, if not below. And there are these Maori performers in traditional Maori dress, bare arms, bare legs doing their song and dance routine in this freezing weather and we were all sitting there like this.

Now did you actually describe the *Sydney*?

Sydney was a light aircraft carrier of the old style, in as much as it had a straight flight deck. These days all aircraft carriers have an angled flight deck. The purpose of the angle is such that as an approaching aircraft misjudges the landing it has the ability then to veer slighting to the left and fly along the angle deck off away from the ship. Now the method of recovering of aircraft in the old days and these days is by arrester wires, and there are typically seven of them transversely across the after deck of the aircraft carrier and these arrester wires are there to collect a hook which is dropped hydraulically by the pilot of the aircraft as he is approaching. The idea being that as the aircraft hits the afterdeck of the aircraft carrier, the hook will drag along the deck, pick up an arrester wire and pull the aircraft to a very abrupt halt. In those days being a straight deck there was no opportunity then to veer off to the left, or very little opportunity to veer off to the left safely, in the event that an arrester wire wasn't picked up. And to prevent a serious accident of

equipment, aircraft and personnel forward, they used to raise three barrier wires. Now if you can imagine a tennis court net that is perhaps 12 feet high, steel wire, and there are three of these, one after the other. So an aircraft coming in hits the deck, misses the arrester wires, the hook misses the arrester wires, it would plough into the barrier wires, and thereby save the aircraft and other things forward. Now barriers as they were colloquially called ,didn't happen very often, but in bad weather there was always a very high chance that they would, and they did happen. And I remember one amazing situation where one aircraft came in, it was an old Firefly. It hit the round-down. If you imagine the afterdeck of the aircraft carrier it sort of bends down towards the stern. It hit the round down bounced right over all the seven arrester wires bounced right over the three barrier wires and ploughed into the aircraft parked forward. Wrote off about five other aircraft. That was a unique experience.

Did you witness that?

Yes, yes.

So what went through your mind when you saw this?

I just couldn't believe it, it wasn't happening. It seemed to be happening in slow motion. Now if you see film of aircraft landing on aircraft carriers which is fairly common, they seem to come in at a very high speed, and they do, but on this particular occasion it looked to me as though everything was happening in slow motion. The aircraft came in, and it hit and it bounced, bang.

What happened to the pilot?

He wasn't injured fortunately. But he was severely reprimanded.

Yeah, expensive crash there.

Yes. On occasions and every trip you did, there was always some sort of incident or accident where an aircraft was damaged. Now one of three things would happen. Either the aircraft could be repaired on board because the damage was minor, or it was not sufficiently damaged that it couldn't be repaired and therefore it was stowed in the hanger until we reached Kure again when it was offloaded for repair in the main workshops. Or if it was so badly damaged, "Jumbo", which was the name given to the mobile crane would pick up the aircraft go to the side of the ship and just drop it in the water. Get rid of it that way. Pull out all the good radio equipment first, of course.

So you've described what a normal landing involves with the wires and the arrester wires and also what happens when it's a not so normal landing. What happens during a normal take off?

It's the same as today. The principal is identical. To become airborne, an aircraft has to achieve a certain speed relative to the air. Now, free take offs as they are called, can happen, providing that there is sufficient deck space and there is sufficient airspeed over the ship. You can imagine the aircraft carrier, one aircraft right aft. The aircraft carrier is heading into the wind so you've got say 30 knots of wind coming over the deck. The aircraft has sufficient distance to gather speed relative to the air speed to become airborne. Now on a crowded ship when you have got 20 or 30 aircraft to launch off, it's impossible to do free take offs. So they are hydraulically assisted. They have steam catapults. The aircraft taxis forward, the pilot taxis it forward, positions itself over the catapult. The ground crews attach a wire strop to two hooks under the aircraft, back to the steam catapult. Gives the signal, wind up. The aircraft reaches a take off speed. Now the

thing that stops it taking off is that it's held at the back by a clip. I'll see if I can explain the clip. If you can imagine a hinged bit of steel hanging down right from the back of the aircraft where the wheel is, with a little knob on it. And around that knob is a clamp, and around the clamp is a steel ring. The combined power of the catapult pulling and the aircraft engine running, pushing the aircraft forward is sufficient to break that steel ring. The two clamps come open; the aircraft is free to take off. And that's what launches the aircraft. The steam catapult and the breaking piece of steel. Amazing isn't it?

It is, yeah.

But going back to the landing. There were many occasions early on in the piece where the pilot really couldn't see what he was doing. Here was the aircraft carrier moving along and here's the aircraft coming into land. It's above the aircraft deck, obviously is has to be, and the pilot can't see. He's looking out the sides trying to find out where he is in relation to the ship. They developed the assistance of what is called "the batman". Now Batman has nothing to do with the founder of Melbourne and nothing to do with Robin. Batman is a trained, experience pilot, and he had two bats, like table tennis bats, only bigger and brightly coloured, red and colour. And he had his own special sponson, right aft, almost at the same level as the flight deck, just a little bit below and as far aft as possible. So batman, when the aircraft were landing, would guide the aircraft in. Now the method of approach was; the ship was steaming into the wind, squadron of aircraft come back, they peel off one at a time. They fly down wind, away from the carrier, they do a left hand turn 180 degrees which lines them up with the track of the aircraft carrier, so they are travelling in the same distance but at a faster speed of course. They have to catch up. Now at the appropriate time, when they are approaching perhaps quarter of a mile off, Batman starts signalling, "You're right wing is too high, come down." "You are still too high, you are too low." Get the idea. So he would give the signals that brings the aircraft in, so the pilot focuses on batman, he doesn't focus on the ship, total reliance on batman. At the appropriate time batman gives one of two signals. Either cut or away, and if he gives that signal and the pilot has to give full thrust and get away from the ship and come around again. That has been replaced by the mirror landing system, so in later days the pilot would simply watch himself reflected in the mirror, parabolic mirror, lights, he could see himself in relation to the deck by the lights. He would know what his orientation was, no problem.

Incredible, amazing. Now what were your responsibilities at this time?

Once I was commissioned, I was first of all the assistant electrical officers for what the called the Carrier Air Group—*Melbourne* Carrier Air Group. And that group comprised two squadrons of Gannet aircraft and one squadron of Sea Venom aircraft. The Gannet aircraft was an interesting aircraft, propeller driven, kerosene turbine engine, what they called a double-mamba engine. That was the trade name driving two contra rotating propellers. Now to get the aircraft airborne, and it carried a crew of three incidentally. To get the aircraft airborne both engines and both propellers had to be going. But once it got airborne it could fly on one engine which gave it an incredibly long duration range and it could go out and search for submarines hour after hour after hour. The Sea Venom aircraft was a search and attack fighter aircraft. Quite different. So my responsibility initially was as the assistant electrical officer for that group. Subse-

quently they decided that each squadron would have its own engineer officer. It had it's own squadron CO, had its own senior pilot, its own pilots, its own observers and its own engineer officer and electrical officer, and that was my second job as a commissioned officer. The AEO [Aviation Engineering Officer] of 805 Squadron.

Now I think you said *Melbourne* Carrier Air Group, did you mean *Sydney* or was that a different?

No, when I was commissioned, *Melbourne* was the aircraft carrier at the time. I'm jumping ahead in time, I'm sorry. Going back the days of *Sydney* I had two responsibilities. One was as the workshops maintenance engineer for the radar equipment. And secondly to assist the deck crews, the squadron crews, in the launches of aircraft. Each day as I said, this is during the Korean War, we'd be patrolling up and down the Yellow Sea and probably about 6 o'clock in the morning in the freezing cold we would line the aircraft up and perhaps spend two hours on the aircraft deck in these freezing conditions getting them airborne and then later on when they came back from their reconnaissance flight, securing them, making sure they were okay, repairing anything that was necessary. So I had those two responsibilities. Some workshop, some on the flight deck.

Now what was your understanding of what the Korean War was all about?

Well, I'm not quite sure I really understood it. I was told that communism, the ideology of communism, was a threat to the capitalist society in which we lived and that it was bad and it had to be stopped. And the way to stop it was not by diplomatic or negotiating means but by actually going out and killing them. And that's really what happened until some people started to see sense and say, "Hey, this is not the way to fix the problem." And that has made sense. In all those years, in those past 50 odd years there has been no real war between the north and the south. It's been a stand off. Now the problem's not solved, but they haven't been killing each other. That's no way to solve any problem by killing.

Was this something that you questioned at the time?

Not so much at the time. I was doing my duty to Queen and country. I believed in the infallibility of the naval system. I did what I believed was the right thing to do. It's only in later years I've had a chance to think in retrospect about those things. So no, I don't believe it was the right thing at all. Not now.

What was your understanding of what communism was back then?

Communism was an ideal world where the wealth was shared equally by all. Where there was no superior and no inferior class. Where there was no rich and there was no poor. Where everyone contributed equally to the whole society. That was my concept of communism. And I could see that it just didn't exist. It was an ideology. But I don't know if I've answered the question?

Yeah, you certainly did answer it, yeah? So where was the *Sydney* based?

Based in this inland sea port of Kure, which as I said before was very close to the town of Hiroshima. I studied the Japanese language for two years at one stage.

Where you able to visit?

Able to.

Able to visit?

Yes I took a train trip there on two occasions and was, I won't say devastated, but shocked by the extent of the

damage which still existed so many years after the atom bomb was dropped. There were no buildings above three stories. There were vast treks of land where all you could see were little humpies. Tin roofs, thatched roofs where people lived. The Japanese economic recovery was a marvel of that century I think. To go from what they had to what they achieved in the next 25 years was astonishing. Now admittedly they had American foreign aid but even if they had not had that foreign aid, I still think they would have achieved a remarkable recovery of some nature.

How were you received by the people of Hiroshima?

With suspicion. With reserve. Avoided. Different from Kure. Kure was the base for the Australian Navy and a few kilometres around was another town called Iwakuni. Iwakuni was the base for the Australian Army. So for some years since the BCOF, British Commonwealth Occupation Forces, went into Japan after the armistice, the people of Kure had become conditioned to Australians being there. Australians being what they are, typically gregarious, friendly and so on, the people of Kure regarded us as buddies. Particularly as we had money to spend.

But not the people of Hiroshima?

But not the people of Hiroshima, no. They didn't know us. And Americans were even more avoided than Australians in Hiroshima.

Could you understand those reasons? Could you understand that behaviour?

Oh yes, because the Americans were seen as the villains in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They are the ones who flew the aircraft. They are the ones who developed the bomb regardless of the fact that other people and nations were involved in the development of the bomb. They were the ones who did it. They are the Americans.

What else did you see there in terms of physical injuries of the people?

I didn't see any of the things that you read about. The horrible scars, the burns or anything like that on the people. All I saw was the results of the effects of the bomb on the buildings and surrounds.

And obviously in the way that they behaved to the Americans and Australians.

Yes, all foreigners.

So getting back to Kure. Describe Kure to me?

At that time Kure was a village. It had a main street with shops on either side, and behind the shops were living quarters, residences. And again these residences were little more than humpies. Nothing substantial at all in the way of any sort of buildings, other than those buildings which had been ex Japanese Army or Navy offices or workplaces or administrative centres. And there were a few of those there. Two or three storey brick steel constructions. But for the people, they lived in humpies. A similar sort of thing in Hong Kong, just to digress. In Hong Kong today there are multi storey buildings literally everywhere. When we first went in there during the Korean War, there were vast areas of humpies occupied by migrants who have struggled across the border without getting shot from communist China. Now an interesting thing was all these people had to be fed and they developed a practice, an enterprise called "Jenny's Side Party". Now Jenny's Side Party was started by an enterprising Chinese gentleman and he recruited a number of women, dozens and dozens of them to go aboard all the ships in Hong Kong harbour regardless of whether they were

merchant ships or service ships. And collect all the food scraps. So you can imagine in the aircraft carrier *Sydney*. Down in the stokers mess, they finish their meal, Jenny's Side Party girls come around, pick up the plates, scrape up the food into different containers, typically buckets, which they'd take ashore and sell as food to these migrants from communist China. The real money was made by the food that was left over in the galley. The food that wasn't served out. And that made millionaires of a number of Chinese people, Jenny's Side Party. And there were quite literally hundreds or maybe thousands of Chinese women who were part of this fascinating enterprise, Jenny's Side Party.

What a wonderful idea.

Yes.

Now getting back to Kure again, I believe that you had to stay within a set perimeter?

That's right, yes. The occupation force requirements were that servicemen were allowed into certain very restricted areas only, in our particular area Iwakuni or Kure, and to go to a place like Hiroshima we had to get special permission. A signed document: yes this person can travel. The same happened to the east in Yokosuka which was the port for Yokohama in Tokyo, and that was an American base port. The same sort of thing there. If the Americans wanted to go somewhere like Tokyo. We went to Tokyo a couple of times; we had to have a signed document saying yes, this person has approval to travel to this city during this period.

What was Tokyo like?

If I said it was like Christchurch, New Zealand on a Sunday morning, that wouldn't be much of an exaggeration. Very few people. In the Ginza [famous business district] you could quite literally fire a gun and not hit anyone. Where they all were I don't know, but they weren't out on the streets. There were a few servicemen around; there were a few Japanese police around but the place was, by and large, deserted. It was fascinating.

How much interaction did you have with the Americans?

As little as possible. We just didn't seem to get on for some reason. We thought they were loud mouth and they thought we were parochial and insular. Both was probably right.

And what about how much interaction you had with the local Japanese people in Kure?

A lot if they were tradespeople. And if they were more particularly retail people. They had to make a living by selling. We had money. They had things that we wanted. Silk products, lacquer ware, cloisonné work. All those sort of artefacts which to us were fantastically cheap. I'm sure we paid three times as much as they were worth, but both parties were very satisfied. So we had a lot of interaction with them. Prostitution was rife there too. You could walk down the street at night and be accosted 20 times. "Hello boy san. Me cherry girl," meaning I'm a virgin. Many of the fellas succumbed of course, because they were very attractive some of these women. After a couple of visits to Kure at night time it started to appal because it was a village atmosphere and one night I decided I'd go back to the ship early, by myself. Now the method of transport from the ship's wharf to Kure was by, I forget the name of what they called these vehicles, but if you can imagine a motorcycle with a rear wheel taken off, an axle put on the back and two wheels. You had a motor tricycle. Now on top of that chassis an almost circular body placed with an almost

circular bench that would seat five passengers. So he had the Japanese motorbike driver in the front and he's got five passengers around the back. Now this thing was their taxi transport and they'd probably go at top speed something like 10 to 15 kilometres per hour along the bumpy road. And this particular night I decided I would go back to the ship early, and before I tell you the rest of the story I've got to tell you there were two expressions that were of prime importance when you are haggling with the shopkeepers. One is, number one "ichiban," ichiban means number one which means "it's the best, it's the top." But the other end of the spectrum there is "juban", juban is number ten. That's the pits, it's the worst. So on this particular night I went back to the ship in this thing by myself and the typical fare was something like 200 yen. So if four of us took a motor taxi that would be 50 yen each. And I wasn't going to pay 200 yen for a ride by myself so I offered the driver a 100 yen. And he argued, as he would, and I argued because I was in a foul mood. And all of a sudden I started to realise that I was in a precarious position because this guy was probably in his thirties. Probably a year or so earlier he had been at the other end of a bayonet fighting Australians, and all of a sudden I could see myself with a knife between my ribs. So I edged him over towards the sentry and I said, "Sentry, I think the right fare from Kure to here is 100 yen, and he says 200 yen, what do you think?" Naturally he said "It's a hundred yen," and there was a dead silence and racing through my mind were these warnings that I had had before, "Watch his eyes, that will tell you when he is going to move." No, no, "Watch his hands because they are the ones that are going to do the damage," no, no, no, "Watch his feet because they will tell you the way he's going to move." And after what seemed like an hour, which was probably two seconds, he said with all the vehemence he could put into his voice, he said, "Number ten" and got on his motorbike and rode off. So all sorts of interesting experiences.

You mentioned the cherry girls, otherwise known as prostitutes. How prevalent was VD [venereal disease] back then?

Surprisingly little as far as I can ascertain. Part of the deal with a prostitute was that "Mama san", who ran the brothel, would provide condoms. So the opportunity for sexual transmitted diseases was quite considerably limited. I don't know. I can't recall. We were always warned of course on the ship before anyone went ashore or came into a port about the potential for venereal disease and to take precautions. "If you have to go and sleep with a woman, take precautions." But I don't recall any aftermath, any admonition coming from the medical officer on the ship saying, "We've just had a week in so and so port in Manila and this is the situation." Nothing like that at all.

How often were the Australian men going with the Japanese women?

How often?

Yeah.

I don't know, but I would say frequently because it was quite a business as far as the women were concerned.

Were Australian men going with other Japanese women aside from the prostitutes?

Some, a very few as I understand it, were at the time, apparently serious about a permanent relationship. Many of those didn't come to fruition, and as a consequence there are right now today, a number of half breeds in Japan who are looked down upon by the pure Japanese.

They are a product of an Asian and a European liaison.

Were any of those relationships successful?

I believe a few were, yes. I came across in Melbourne a Japanese woman whose husband was an army sergeant who died in Australia. Had a heart attack. They had a son, and that relationship apparently was a very successful one. So yes, there were some successes, but I think they were in the minority. That sort of thing is sort of tolerated in Australia, more so these days with this wretched multiculturalism that we have. But in Japan its not. If you're not pure Japanese, regardless of who you are, you are not part of the Japanese society. You are ostracised.

What was your opinion of the Japanese?

Two faced, they'd smile and they'd bow and you had the feeling all the time that they hated your guts. You are the victor, we are the vanquished and we don't like that, but we won't let you know. We will smile.

How much of that feeling was reciprocated do you think?

Reciprocated in what way?

How was it that the Japanese had this feeling towards you? How much of that was reflected back on what the Australians felt towards the Japanese?

Some, particularly when it came, most of the time it was accepted but on occasions we would be reminded about instances like Sandakan, Burma Railway, things like that and that's when the hatred on our part would boil up. But I won't say that they were isolated instances as such but they were periodic, interspersed with much of the time. They were just awfully nice people.

George, you mentioned before your two positions on board the *Sydney*. If you could go into a bit more detail about what those jobs actually involved?

Yes, the official position was technician in charge of the radar repair shop. The aircraft would carry search and attack radar and most of the equipment in those days was designed around the thermionic valve. The thermionic valve is a glass valve in which there is an incandescent burner, which emits electrons. The electrons are accelerated through the thermionic valve providing the amplification for the signals. They are obviously by nature of the construction subject to damage, relatively easy damage, particularly from impact Gs. You can imagine an aircraft landing on a deck, thump, where the impact G might be in the vicinity of four or five, which is quite considerable. That sort of impact has very little effect on transistors, but thermionic valves, by nature of the construction, it can damage them. Therefore there were many occasions after a reconnaissance flight or a sortie where the communication equipment, the radar equipment would fail to work, and probably 99 per cent of the cases it was due to the thermionic valve failure in the equipment, caused by the thump. So my workshop was set up to do the repair to the radar equipment as a consequence of that. So after each flight sortie, reconnaissance, whatever you want to call it, I would typically have quite a few hours of work. Then I would have nothing to do. The unofficial part of my job, was when there was an aircraft launch, I would go up onto the flight deck and help the squadron maintenance people get the aircraft ready and sort out any immediate problems that happened at the time. On one particular occasion early in the morning the observer signalled me as having a problem with one of his pieces of equipment. I hopped up onto the main plane stub, because he opened the canopy, looked inside, decided what the problem was and I forget what it was at the

moment, but we fixed it there and then. I turned around to get off the aircraft and slipped on the icy steel of the, on the icy metal of the aircraft and fell onto the flight deck and landed on my backside. And years later that has been the source of a problem which has resulted in a partial disability pension that I get from Veterans' Affairs. But it took a long time for me to realise that that was the prime cause. Fortunately there was medical records in archives that supported the claim, otherwise I might have had some difficulty. But ever since then I have been very, very grateful to Veteran's Affairs for that partial pension. It's not just the money itself, prior to the gold card which I have, it was the payment of treatment necessary.

Yeah, it sounds like it's a painful physical condition.

Particularly after I have been sitting still for a while in a motor car or this chair. And surprisingly at night time or early in the morning I have considerable difficulty out getting out of bed in the morning. Once I'm up and moving things are okay. But it goes right back to that particular incident.

Yeah, it's amazing you know. You hear about back problems but just once it goes, its so hard to get it back on track isn't it?

Yes, I know an interviewer in your organisation who has got a disc problem. Makes him an irritable and cranky sort of person.

He's all right. Now you have talked about your duties now but what would be a typical day for you on board the *Sydney*?

Well we slept in hammocks on the *Sydney*. Get out of your hammock, lash up and stow, seven lashes, stow the hammock. Shave, get dressed, queue up for breakfast, go down to the workshop and see if there is anything hanging over from yesterday that needed to be doing. If there were aircraft that were about to be launched go up to the flight deck and see what I could do to help out, just to keep me occupied. Wait for the aircraft to return knowing perfectly well that there would be work. And I looked forward to that work. Occasionally there were modifications to be carried out to some of the equipment but not too often. Sometimes because of the volume and the nature of the problem I might work through the whole night fixing. This didn't happen often, fixing the problems. But most of the time by evening the work was done so it was unlike the routine of others who had been on watch at four o'clock, came off watch at eight o'clock. By and large I was driven by the work. The work drove me. I didn't say, "It's eight o'clock I'm going to start." I said, "There is work to be done, I will start," "There's no work to do, I won't do anything." Quite different. I enjoyed that.

Yeah, sounds kind of good. Now who was the captain of the *Sydney* at this time?

A fellow called George Oldham. George is not very well known. You don't find his name mentioned in histories like Hastings-Harrington, Admiral Sir Hastings-Harrington or Sir David Martin. You don't hear about him to that extent, but George was first and foremost, a seaman. He was brilliant at handling his ship. At Kure we had our own wharf, a very well constructed wharf, being Japanese it was well constructed. And at the far end, at the land end of the wharf was a big bluestone wall, huge wall. And in huge letters, ten feet high letters read, "Accident's don't happen, they are caused." Now George used to bring his ship in, and remember there are lots of little islands all around. It's quite confined there. He'd bring his ship in at five or six knots, that's about nine or ten kilometres

an hour, which doesn't sound very fast but for a 20,000 ton ship in a confined area that's quite an exciting sort of speed. At sea it's nothing, where you've got expanse of sea all around you, but on these confined situations five or six knots is quite fast. And George used to bring *Sydney* in at quite an acute angle and he'd judge it perfectly. Half a stern, throw out the heaving lines, throw out the mooring lines, tie up. And you could bet your bottom dollar that with him coming around the corner and seeing the wharf, within 15 minutes everything would be all over. He was a brilliant ship handler. As a disciplinarian, didn't see much of him, because being air arm, we were under the direction of the fellow they called "Commander Air". Commander Air had control of all the aircraft operations on the ship. And again as opposed to the Jimmy, that's a colloquial expression for the second in command to the captain who in this particular case happened to be a Commander and in this case the commander was Robertson, the fellow who was the captain of *Melbourne*, later on during the accident. So he had his own responsibilities with the ship people. Commander Air had his own responsibilities with us, the fly boys.

What was the commander of air like?

He was an ex-pilot so he was, will I say a human being? He was an approachable sort of a man. He had been through the ranks. He had done it tough like most pilots. I don't know how some of those guys could continue day after day, week after week, month after month. Some of them year after year, being launched. Typically on a launch, because of the acceleration, you go from zero to maybe 120 kilometres an hour in a matter of point eight of a second. Now that is a terrific G force on you and typically on each launch the crew would black out for perhaps a second, and the method of handling the aircraft at launch was, you know the aircraft has a joystick. Instead of holding the joystick what would happen was the pilot would sit there like this with his hands like that with a joystick in front. The launch would happen, he would black out and by the time in came around, the joystick was back in his hand. Landing was a lot easier. The G force on landing might have been as much as three and a half, maybe four G's and that was by comparison almost a pleasurable experience. You come in and you are about 80 knots and in a matter of half a second the hook has grabbed the arrester wire and you have stopped. So the G forces are a lot less.

That's incredible that they blacked out. How long would they be blacked out for?

Oh, maybe a second or more, but they would go out, and they knew that. They all knew that.

Better them than me I think. Now for how much longer were you on the *Sydney* for?

I was on the *Sydney* for about two years in total, and that's when I came ashore and that's when I had the discussion with my divisional officer about promotion to chief petty officer and we went through the process then of becoming a commissioned officer.

You've also been saying that you were on the *Melbourne* as well at some point?

Yes, as a commissioned officer. I spent a fair bit of time on *Melbourne*. I did a number of tours of the Far East, Singapore a number of times, Hong Kong a number of times. Never went into the Philippines in the navy. I went into the Philippines later on when I worked with IBM. But Papua New Guinea. Yeah, the Far East and New Zealand. Oh, I've got to tell you about this. One stage we did a tour of New Zealand. Milford Sound,

H.M.A.S. MELBOURNE - PROGRAMME : OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1959.

EMBARKATION. Monday 12th October.

WORKUP. Jervis Bay and Sydney Areas.
Monday 12th October - Wednesday 28th October.

ARRIVE.		DEPART.
Friday 30th October	MELBOURNE	Tuesday 10th November.
Sunday 15th November	MILFORD SOUND AREA.	Sunday 15th November.
Wednesday 18th Nov.	WELLINGTON	Saturday 21st Nov.
Monday 23rd Nov.	HAURAKI GULF	Thursday 26th Nov.
Thursday 26th Nov.	AUCKLAND	Monday 30th Nov.

DISEMBARK. Saturday 5th December.

PAYDAYS. October 8th and 22nd.
November 5th and 19th.
December 3rd.

DURATION. 38 days, Sydney to Disembarkation.

FLYING. Estimate about 14 days.

** P R O G R A M M E **

On the occasion of the visit of "H.M.A.S. MELBOURNE" to the Republic of Indonesia from June 16 th to 17 th 1960 at the invitation of the Indonesian Navy.

A. RECEPTION :
20.00 - 21.00 Hrs.
at Wisma Nusantara club - house.

B. ENTERTAINMENT :
21.00 - 23.00 Hrs.

I. M U S I C :

a. Sewindu (An Age) - sung by Orlend.
b. Persembahanku (My share) - sung by Aman Santoso.
c. S e n j u m (Smile) - sung by Mimi Mariani.
d. La Paloma - sung by Abdul Hadi.

II. TARI PIRING (SAUCER DANCE)

A Minangkabau dance by Sumijati.
Minangkabau being a region in central Sumatera.
The dancer gracefully balancing the saurces with burning candles on them.

III. M U S I C :

a. The lonely one - instrumental. Idris on the violin accompanied by Indonesian Naval band.
b. Melody D'amour - sung by Mimi Mariani.
c. Memories of you- sung by Aman Santoso.
d. Kisah Malam didjalan Lembang (Lembang road by night) sung by Sumijati.

IV. TARI SERAMPANG DUA BELAS : (" DANCE OF THE 12 MOVEMENTS ")

This Sumatran dance is becoming more and more popular among the Indonesians as well as among the foreigners, the rythm of the accompanying music having much in common with Cha-Cha-Cha.
Dancer : well known filmstar Nun Zaerina.

V. M U S I C :

a. Potpourri - sung by Asijk Widjaja.
b. I'm in the mood for love - sung by Orlend.
c. I want to be happy - instrumental. with Idris on the violin accompanied by Indonesian Naval band.
d. Chiribiribin - sung by Abdul Hadi.

VI. .....

VI. LEGONG KERATON (DANCE OF PALACE) :

The palace dance in former days was only performed within the courts of Balinese - Kings, particularly on the occasion of important riligous ceremonies.
The performers were usually the daughters of the kings or of high dignitaries of the court.
With the change of time this special dance became gradually known also to the common people and at present is one of the most precious possessions of art of the Balinese people.

VII. M U S I C :

a. Maria Dolore - sung by the Soemijati and Mimi Mariani.
b. Bed Ford - Instrumental. / Duo

VIII. A FAREWELL SONG :

Njiur Melambai - Instrumental.

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Wellington, Auckland, Haruaki Gulf, all around New Zealand. Now when we went into Milford Sound, the air was absolutely still.* The water was absolutely flat calm and we steamed slowly in and then stopped. Now Milford Sound is fairly narrow, particularly if you've got a big lump of a ship like an aircraft carrier in there. So they put into practice what they called "Operation Pinwheel". And what they did was at each end of the ship they got two aircraft facing in opposite directions and fix them down to the flight deck with wires, steel wires. Started up the engines and slowly spun the ship through 180 degrees; Operation Pinwheel. So she was facing the right way to go out. That was interesting.

Why did they do that?

Well, in order to turn that big lump of a ship round in the restricted area of Milford sound, what they would have had to do was what you do in a car in a tight space. Go forward, turn right, stop, come back again, and make several manoeuvres. This was quite simple, just spin the ship. It probably took five minutes, that was all. But that was quite fascinating to know that a ship that size could be turned around in water just by two aircraft running their engines. They weren't running at high speed either.

Was that the ingenuity of the captain?

I don't know who thought of it, but whoever it was I thought it was a brilliant idea. And they announced it. "Tomorrow we are going to have Operation Pinwheel and this is what pinwheel is all about," and at the appointed time that's what happened.

*The air was so still that on their return back out of Milford Sound, the smoke from the ship's inbound journey was still hanging motionless in the air where it had been left.

Fascinating, that's great. Just getting back to the *Sydney* for a little bit longer, you mentioned that you were a member of crew for two years. Now during that time you must have developed friendships, mates, during this time. Could you talk about some of your mates from the *Sydney*?

Most of them were either in, well all of them I would say were exclusively in the fleet air arm. No, that's not quite true. Most of them were in the fleet air arm, the others were radio mechanics belonging to the ship with whom I had trained in the years past. At Adelaide, at *Watson* and *Cerberus* and so on. But almost exclusively they were fleet air arm personnel in the radio branch, in the electrical branch, and some of the aircraft handlers. These are the fellas that moved the aircraft around physically. They pushed them and when the aircraft lands and picks up the arrester wire, two fellows rush out and disconnect the hook from the arrester wire. They are the aircraft handlers. So I made friends with some of the aircraft handlers, but mainly they were fleet air arm personnel. Maintenance engineers, air frames, fitters, the electrical and the radio people.

What was the relationship like between the ground crew and the pilots?

Pilots and observers air crew, ground crew and air crew. Generally pretty good. They had the air crew, well let me split it. The pilots had a fairly high regard for the maintenance engineers. The observers had a fairly high regard for my trade and the electricians, because the pilots were using equipment maintained by the engineers and the air frames people. The observers were using equipment maintained by our people. So it was a relationship, good relationship, fostered by the nature of the work that each group was doing.

That's good to hear. Sometimes I think the relationship was a bit more—

Tight.

Yeah, a bit more. They were a bit more antagonistic towards each other. So now during this time that you were on board the *Sydney* and later the *Melbourne* were you able to communicate with, or how often were you able to communicate with Shirley, for instance.

Sometimes, a few times there was no communication at all. When Matthew was born I received, the ship received a signal, "Request to advise, sub-lieutenant Stevens, the birth of his son Matthew. Mother and son doing well." I then, could send a signal back to her but I couldn't have any direct communication because there were simulated war exercises and that sort of communication was not permitted. I don't think I ever had a radio telephone conversation with her. That was out of economic necessity because that cost money, and money was important. We had a house to pay for and that sort of thing. Letters; I would typically write a letter every two days. The postman would come and deliver five letters to Shirley and she'd rush into the bedroom and open them up and read them. So our main communication was by postal correspondence.

Now I want to explore that a bit further, but before we do that can you just make the link from leaving the *Sydney* and how you came to be on the *Melbourne*?

On the *Sydney* I was maintenance mechanic engineer for the radar equipment exclusively. Went to *Albatross*, similar position, concerned that I wasn't getting promotion, took the appropriate action, became a commissioned officer and the nature of my work then changed. Changed from being a maintenance engineer to the officer-in-charge of maintenance engineers. So that was the essential difference.

And that's what you were doing on *Melbourne*?

And that's what I was doing on *Melbourne*. And that's what I did for almost six years as a commissioned officer on *Melbourne* and at *Albatross* itself.

And during these changes with these ships were you able to visit Sydney at all. Go back home?

Oh yes. Most of the time that we were married we were either living in rented premises in married quarters at *Albatross*, or in these little dumps in Huskisson, or in our own little nest that we built. And that's what we left when I quit the navy.

Now getting back to when Matthew was born. What was it like to receive that telegram?

Oh, highly delighted, because we had been married at that stage; he was born in 1960, we were married in 1953, although the marriage wasn't consummated until 1954. So to all intents and purposes we had been married for six years before he came along. We had counselling, we had medical tests, we tried all sorts of remedies. Eventually we discovered that sex had something to do with becoming pregnant so after six years of marriage without progeny, and wanting it all the time, it was, "Hallelujah, it's happened". And blow me down two years later we had a second one, a daughter.

Now there must have been other feelings as well in terms of not being able to be there for the birth. What were some of those feelings?

Well they resulted in a significant contributing factor to my ultimate resignation. One of the reasons was the drunkenness as I said before, and the promotion on the

basis of seniority but I estimated that based on the time of absence from home and the time in the position of a commissioned officer related to a retirement age of 55, I could be expect to be away from home an aggregate of something like eight years. And I thought "What's the point in getting married, if you're going to do this?" Now some families found that great. Not me. I married to have a married life. So you asked me what my feelings were at the time. Delighted of course with the birth of a son but later on I felt I'm not going to go through this again. I'm not going to put Shirley through this again. I'm not going to have her relying on casual friends to look after her in her pregnancy and labour.

Because what was it like for Shirley?

She was happy being in her own home. Her mother wanted her to come to Sydney. Absolutely not, she was going to stay in her own home, even though, at that stage we did have electricity. We didn't have running water still and the toilet was still out the back. But it was her home and there was no question, she was going to stay there. These good neighbours of ours, elderly couple, took her into Nowra hospital where Matthew was born. Visited her on the day she was there, brought her home again. But once she was home she wanted to be by herself with her little baby.

So how old was Matthew when you got to see him for the first time?

It was about three months I suppose.

What was that like?

Exciting. For two reasons. One, because I was seeing him for the first time, but Shirley took sick, confined to her bed. So I spent from 6 am till about 10 pm every day bathing, feeding, washing nappies, shopping, getting meals, looking after him because she was confined to bed. Interesting time.

Now had you resigned at this point?

No, I resigned, Matthew was just a coming up for a year old when I decided, putting all these feelings together, that I just couldn't stay in it any longer. Had I stayed in the navy, there was a high probability I would have retired as a captain, at least. Because as I said, two of my contemporaries retired as captains. Three retired as commanders. One retired as a commodore. There was a high probability that I would have retired with a good rank and a reasonably good pension. But looking at those three factors, even in retrospect, knowing now how tough it was after I left the navy, I made the right decision to go. The family have become very important to me.

So what happened when you did resign?

All my friends, my boss, Commander L [?], all said, "You can't resign." "Naval officers don't resign." I said, "I'm going." And I wrote my letter of resignation to the naval board. I don't know if you saw that recent television program where Captain Robertson is quoted as saying, "I requested permission to resign." Now if that permission had been refused he would not have resigned. I didn't request permission to resign, I resigned. A significant difference there. That was in October of 1960, and they all said, "Naval board won't accept that." But I persisted and by the end of March next year I was out of the navy. And that's when it started to get hard. Ex naval officer, no problem, everyone's going to employ me. Two months later, lots of bills coming in, no money coming in, so I swallowed my pride and went to David Jones and sold socks, just to get some money.

And then came the opportunity. I saw an advertisement

in the paper that Channel 9 were looking for technicians who had experience in "pulse" technique, because the outside broadcast van, the signals were transmitted on short wave. I was right up to speed on that and they snapped me up. But I didn't like working in overalls. Snob. You see, a taste of the officer class. Teaches you to appreciate the nice things in life. Didn't like working in white overalls. Looked for a better opportunity and found this company called IBM that was looking for people who were experienced in pulse technique, because they were introducing a product called a computer.

Now in those days there were something like sixteen computers in the whole of Australia. Big things. They wouldn't fit into this room. They had the capability of a fraction of a laptop today. It seemed to me as though that was the thing. Now the thing that eventually persuaded me that I had made the right decision after two years of hard work, because at age 32 I was competing with 20 year olds fresh out of university, and that was tough. Some of the training courses I did would start at two o'clock in the morning. Two o'clock in the morning because there was one computer and everyone wanted access to it. So we would start our lectures at two o'clock in the morning, break at six o'clock for breakfast for half an hour, and then we would have time on the computer for practical work. So after two years I started to get results, and all of a sudden I realised I was in a company where you got promotion based on ability. If you did the job and you produced the results, you got promoted. You weren't promoted because you were in the job for five years ahead of Joe Blow who has been in the job for four years and ten months. That was good. I responded well to that. I got a couple of promotions in the field in Sydney. Then they offered me a job of Field Manager in Melbourne, so I took that. Shirley didn't like it because it was moving away from home. I wasn't there for very long when they said, "Hey you're doing well, we want you to come to head office for a six months management development assignment." So back to Sydney for six months, into rented premises at Cremorne, they paid the rent. And I got rent for our place in Melbourne, and then back to Melbourne in a promotion to Branch Engineering Manager where I had three field managers and a staff of about 22, 23 field engineers working for me.

And then the technology started to develop at a very rapid pace. Integrated circuits became part of the technology. Programming, internal programming became more important. You see in my day when I joined IBM all the programming was in machine language, can you believe that? So the technology started to go past me. By this time I was approaching 40 and I wasn't as quick and as smart as I used to be. And then came the opportunity, because of the growth of the IBM company, came the opportunity to become the Melbourne location Personnel Manager. Now in those days we had about 500 people in Melbourne, quite a big operation, so I took that on and that was a success. I had a couple of trips to New York, ostensibly as development assignments but they were IBM's way of saying, "Hey, you've done a good job; you can have a 'jolly' overseas."

And then the Personnel Manager for the IBM New Zealand company was found to be wanting in his job. So I was offered an assignment there for two years and I took that on. Came back to Australia, to Sydney, and by this time I was in my early to mid-forties, about 42, 43 I suppose, and the system started to work against me. See, in the early days IBM insisted on promoting the young people who showed promise and that was the good and

right thing to do. By the time I got to my mid-forties, I was no longer young. Yes, I had marks on the board, yes I had achieved, but I was no longer young. So I moved then into a series of sideways promotions. Still stayed at the same level. Still got the same sort of salary but the promotion up the ladder was blocked. Younger people were coming on. I didn't like it when it happened to me personally but I knew that that was the way that IBM worked and I knew that it was the right way, so intellectually I agreed with it. Emotionally, I didn't like it. So I did a series of jobs in software development and all sorts of different things. I got into marketing, marketing support, that was fun. That gave me a trip to the Philippines for a couple of weeks, for a recognition event. But by age 57 I'd had enough and I'd accumulated sufficient money to be able to retire, so I thought, which I did. And in 1986 I quit the IBM company.

And then I found another hard thing. For four years I found it difficult to adjust to a life where there wasn't excitement, there wasn't movement, there wasn't energy being displayed, there wasn't creativity, there wasn't innovation. All of a sudden I was out on my own. So I was offered then a job of a two year assignment in the Compaq company as the Personnel Manager. Took that on, then became bored with that. Then another company called Wilson Learning offered me opportunities for contract work delivering education programs, "Negotiating to Yes", "Selling", those sort of programs where I would take a group of people, and in a structured education environment, teach them in a week long live in course. And that was fun for a while. And then an old IBM buddy rang me up one day and he said "Eh," he said, "I've got a large sum of money and I've been commissioned by IBM to head up an organisation that is a joint venture between IBM and TAFE [Technical and Further Education], and it's called CIT, Computer Industry Technology, and we are going to operate out of the TAFE headquarters at, the TAFE premises at St Leonards and we are going to teach two things. We are going to teach, this is a product; MVS, Multi Volume System, which is the operating system for large computers, and we are going to teach AS400, which is the operating system for mid range equipment. And he said "I need someone with your experience as a student counsellor. I am going to take people from different walks of life. They are going to pay to have us teach them these two products, and it's going to be intensive courses. The courses are going to last for three months each and I need someone who can look after these people, to help them through the difficult periods. Will you take it on as a contract employee?" I said "Yes, beauty." So that was my next job.

In all this Shirley and I started to get involved in community activities. I took on the role of neighbourhood watch coordinator for Greenwich, and manager of the Greenwich community centre and those two activities brought me certificates of recognition from the New South Wales police and the Lane Cove Council. I had two commendations from the Lane Cove Council, 1986 and 1987. And while I was doing that it came to my attention that there was a little girl who was living in Greenwich who was severely inflicted with cerebral palsy. And when I say severely, she is. She is still alive and she needed a Hart Walker, the name of the man who developed this device which helps physically handicapped people walk on their own. Quite a remarkable thing. But this thing was going to cost $12,000, and would I help raise the money. So Shirley and I put our heads together and we put together a program that involved the local schoolchildren in providing entertainment first of all, followed by an auction of donated goods. And on the particular night we had Der-

ryn Hinch to act as the MC [Master of Ceremonies] and we had Peter, whose name escapes me at the moment, to do the auctioneering. And on that one night we raised $16,000. It was a fantastic night. People just jammed the Greenwich Community Hall. They just couldn't get in, and bidding was fierce for all the products. And that brought us a recognition certificate from the Spastic Society. And we were so keyed up; Shirley and I were so keyed up with the success of that that we went looking for another one. We found a little boy in Turramurra, also badly affected by cerebral palsy but not to the same degree as Isobel was. So we put on another function there. Now that was an interesting experience. It was quite different from the Greenwich one. Greenwich is a very tight community. Everyone knows everyone else and putting that program together was a breeze, it really was. The Turramurra one was different. People would look at us and they would say, "Who are these two old people from Greenwich?" "What are they doing here? What's in it for them?" You know, "What's this all about?" And we worked like steam to try and get people interested and enthused about it and we put together a committee but they were sort of half hearted, and two weeks before the whole thing was scheduled to happen up at the Saint Ives community centre I said to Shirley, "This is not going to work, no one is getting behind it" and for some reason, I don't know what, all of a sudden "boom", away it went and on that night we raised $22,000.

That's amazing.

All sorts of things were advertised. One man advertised his services of cleaning out leaves from your gutters, roof gutters. And I was telling Graham [interviewer] before about Brendan Nelson who came along, and he offered as an item to be auctioned a dinner for four people at Parliament House, Canberra, with coffee afterwards with John Howard. And there were two groups of people who bid very fiercely for that. They had to pay their way to Canberra, their fares. They had to pay for their accommodation in Canberra and they paid something like $560 to get this privilege to go and have dinner down there. There were cricket bats, there were signed jerseys, there were paintings, all sorts of a manner of things.

Sounds amazing.

22,000 in one night.

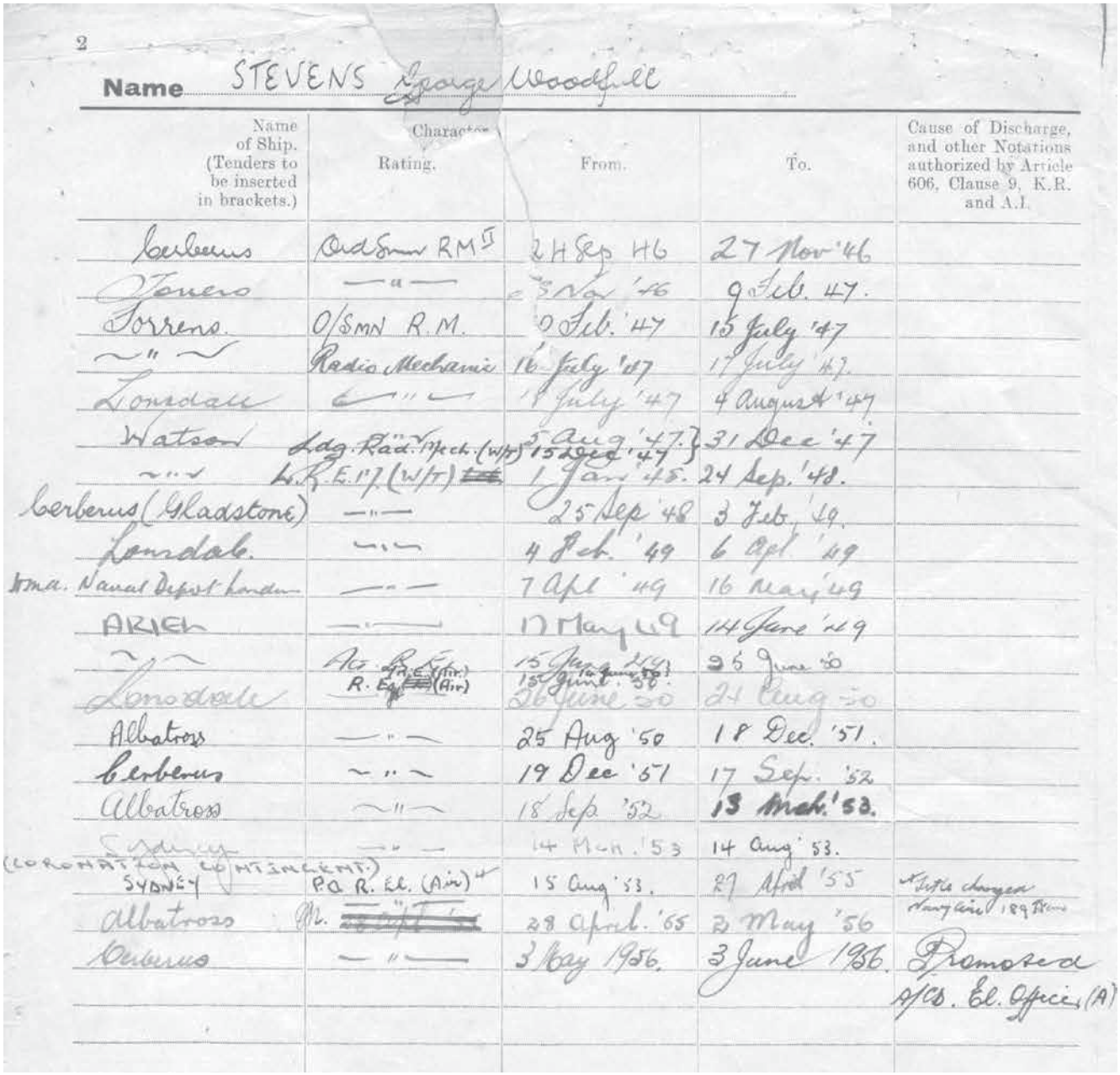
Well George look we are actually coming towards the end of the interview so on behalf of Graham and myself and I'm sorry that's a bit of rush towards the end though but I think we got everything. On behalf of Graham and myself and the Australians at War Archive I'd like to thank you very much for a wonderful day today and sharing your story with us.

Well I appreciate the opportunity of doing this. I'm quite astonished when I was first approached by Elizabeth. I thought, "What the hell can I talk about? In ten minutes I can tell you all there is to know."

Well here we are and we have spent the whole day. Thank you.

Okay.

Appendix 6: Service records

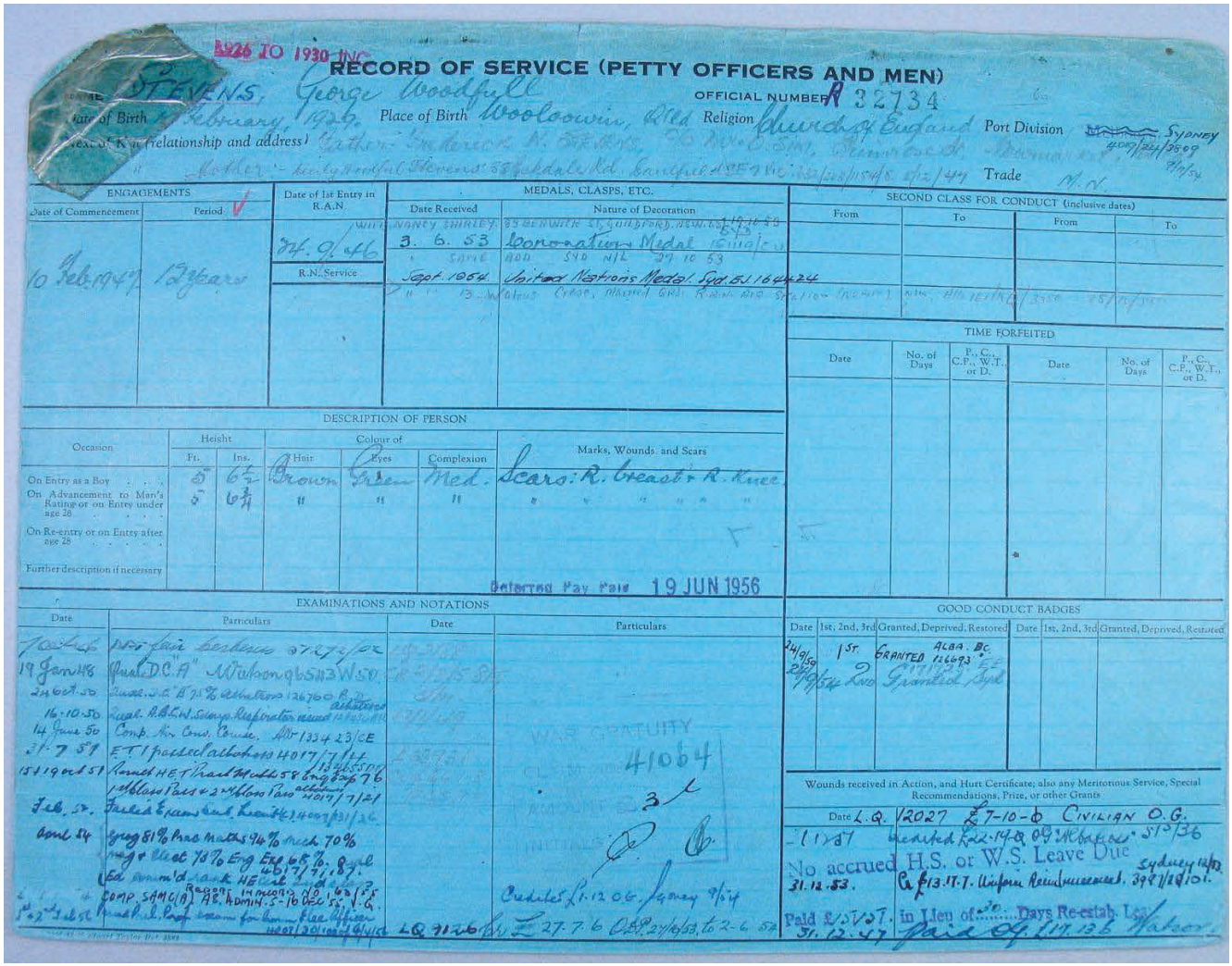


2

Name STEVENS George Woodfull

Name of Ship. (Tenders to be inserted in brackets.)	Character / Rating.	From.	To.	Cause of Discharge, and other Notations authorized by Article 606, Clause 9, K.R. and A.I.
Cerberus	Ord Sman RM 1	24 Sep 46	27 Nov '46	
Tenero	—"—	28 Nov '46	9 Feb. 47.	
Torrens.	O/SMN R.M.	9 Feb. '47	15 July '47	
~"~	Radio Mechanic	16 July '47	17 July '47.	
Londale	~"~	18 July '47	4 August '47	
Watson	Ldg. Rad. Mech. (W/T)	5 Aug '47.	31 Dec '47	
~"~	L.R.E.M. (W/T)	1 Jan '48.	24 Sep. '48.	
Cerberus (Gladstone)	—"—	25 Sep '48	3 Feb. '49.	
Londale.	~"~	4 Feb. '49	6 Apl '49	
RNA. Naval Depot London	—"—	7 Apl '49	16 May '49	
ARIEL	—"—	17 May 49	14 June '49	
~"~	Act. L.R.E. (Air) R. Ea (Air)	15 June 49 15 June 50.	25 June 50	
Londale	—"—	26 June 50	24 Aug 50	
Albatross	—"—	25 Aug '50	18 Dec. '51.	
Cerberus	~"~	19 Dec '51	17 Sep. '52	
Albatross	~"~	18 Sep '52	13 Mch. '53.	
Sydney	—"—	14 Mch. '53	14 Aug '53.	
(Coronation Co/MT 3 Inf Bde HQ) SYDNEY	PO R. El. (Air)	15 Aug '53.	27 April '55	* Title changed from Air to 189 Flight
Albatross	PO. ~~R. El. (Air)~~ T	28 April '55	2 May '56	
Cerberus	—"—	3 May 1956.	3 June 1956.	Promoted A/CS. El. Officer (A)

Date.	Wounds received in Action and Hurt Certificate; also any Meritorious Service, Special Recommendations, Prize, or other Grants; Temporary Advancements to Local (acting) Ratings, with inclusive dates.	Captain's Signature.
30 Nov '54	Recommended for Commissioned Rank (S.L.)	
30 Nov '55	Recommended for Sd. Rank (Branch List)	



1926 TO 1930 INC

RECORD OF SERVICE (PETTY OFFICERS AND MEN)

STEVENS, George Woodfull — OFFICIAL NUMBER P 32734

Date of Birth 7 February, 1926 — Place of Birth Woolooowin, Qld — Religion Church of England — Port Division Sydney

Next of Kin (relationship and address) Father – Frederick A. Stevens, 20 Rowe St, Wmr — Mother – Emily Woodfull Stevens, 58 Adele Rd, Caulfield SE7 — 4007/221/3509

Trade M.N.

ENGAGEMENTS

Date of Commencement	Period
10 Feb 1947	12 Years

Date of 1st Entry in R.A.N. — 24.9.46 (WITH)

R.N. Service

MEDALS, CLASPS, ETC.

Date Received	Nature of Decoration
NANCY SHIRLEY 83 BENWICH 25 GUILDFORD, NSW 19.10.53	
3. 6. 53	Coronation Medal (Civil)
SAME ADD 540 N/L	29 10 53
Sept 1954	United Nations Medal Syd. 51. 164424
" " 13 Wallis Cross, Mentioned Gaz. R.A.N. Mid Sept/Nov 1945	

SECOND CLASS FOR CONDUCT (inclusive dates)

From	To	From	To

TIME FORFEITED

Date	No. of Days	P., C., C.P., W.T. or D.	Date	No. of Days	P., C., C.P., W.T., or D.

DESCRIPTION OF PERSON

Occasion	Height Ft.	Height Ins.	Colour of Hair	Colour of Eyes	Colour of Complexion	Marks, Wounds and Scars
On Entry as a Boy	5	6½	Brown	Green	Med.	Scars: R. breast + R. Knee
On Advancement to Man's Rating or on Entry under age 28	5	6¾	"	"	"	" " "
On Re-entry or on Entry after age 28						
Further description if necessary						

Deferred Pay Paid 19 JUN 1956

EXAMINATIONS AND NOTATIONS

Date	Particulars
7 Jan 48	Post fair Seamen 27.7.6/52
19 Jan 48	Qual. D.C.A" Watson 6543 W.S.O.
24 Oct 50	Course. S.C. B 21% abattoirs 12600 ft. abattoirs
16.10.50	Qual. A.B. & N. Comp. Refrigeration issued
14 June 50	Comp. Air Cons. Course. Mar 1334 23/CE
31.7.51	E.T. I passed at both 10 4017/7/21
15 + 19 Oct 51	Passed HET Part 1 & 2 58 Eng 76 1st Class Pass + 2nd Class Pass at both 4017/7/21
Feb. 52	Failed Examined Part 1 4017/7/21/36
April 54	Engg 81% Prac Maths 94% Mech 70% Engg + Elect 78% Eng Eng 65% 8.9.0 Ed. comm'd. Tank HET 4017/7/21 87% COMP. SAM CLN Regarding Re-entry ADMIN. S-16 DEC 55 L.Q. Passed Part 1 Exam for Commission Officers 4007/221/3509

Date	Particulars
	WAR GRATUITY 41064 3
	Cedules L.1.206 Sydney 9/54
L.Q. 7126	27.7.6 O.S.P. 27/6/53 to 2-6-53

GOOD CONDUCT BADGES

Date	1st, 2nd, 3rd	Granted, Deprived, Restored	Date	1st, 2nd, 3rd	Granted, Deprived, Restored
24/9/50	1st	GRANTED ALBA. BC 116693			
24/9/52	2nd	Granted Syd			

Wounds received in Action, and Hurt Certificate; also any Meritorious Service, Special Recommendations, Prize, or other Grants

Date L.Q. 12027 £7-10-0 CIVILIAN O.G.

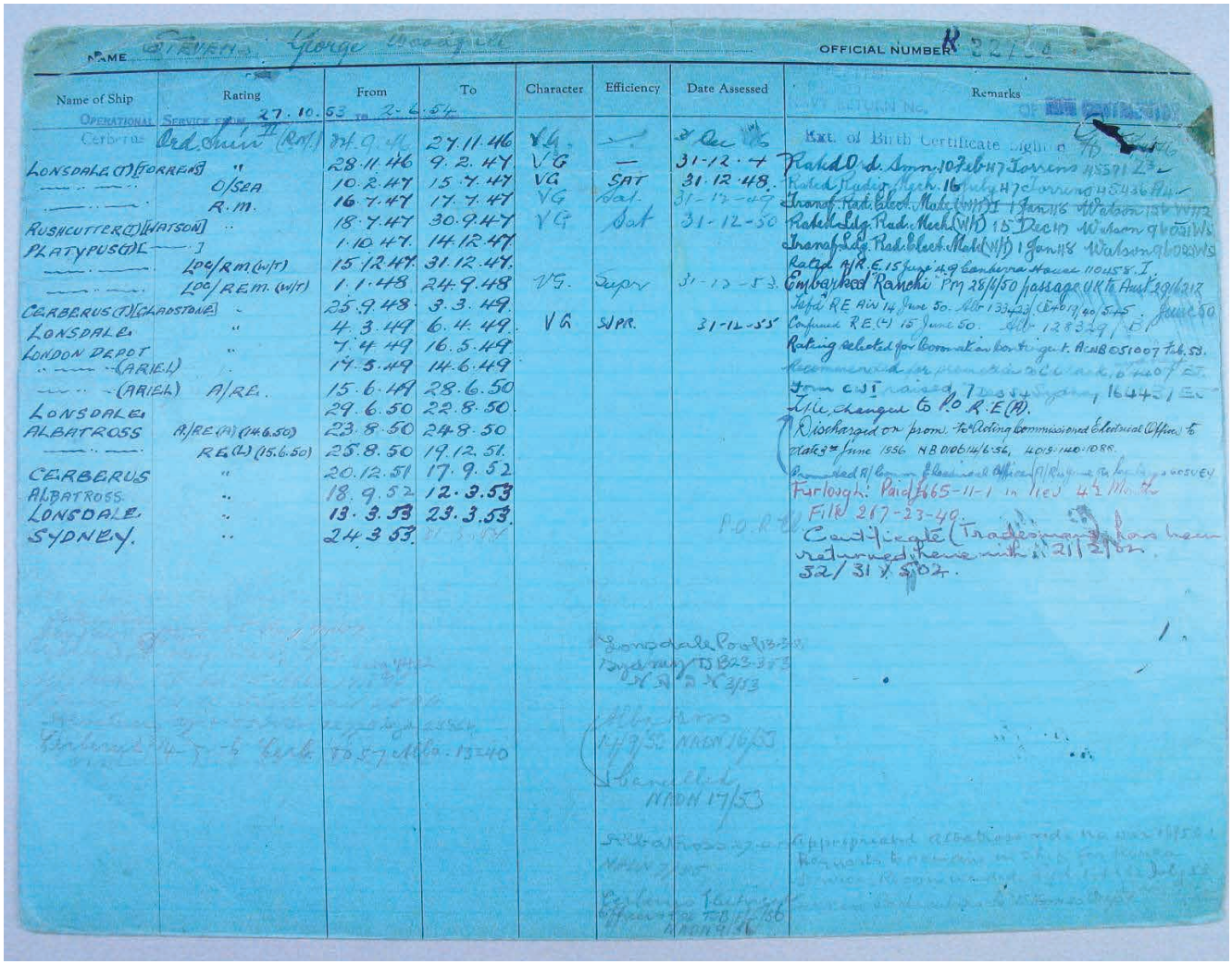
-11-57 awarded L.Q. 14.9.09 Albany SP 136

No accrued H.S. or W.S. Leave Due

31.12.53. C/F 13.11.T. Uniform Reimbursement. 398/28/101.

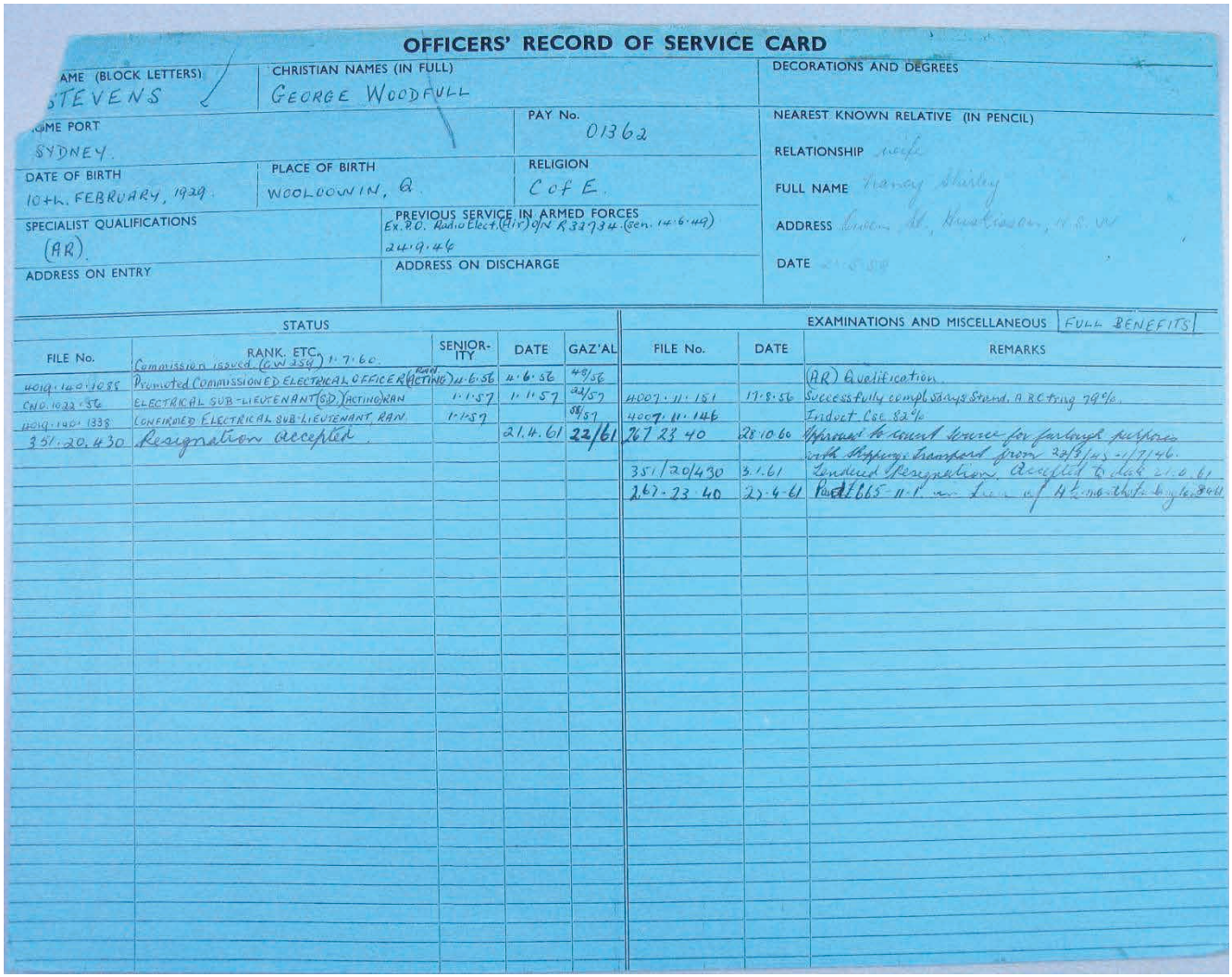
Paid L/S W.T. in lieu of 30 Days Re-estab. Leave

31.12.47 Paid CQ 117 136 Watson



NAME STEVENS George Woodfull OFFICIAL NUMBER R 22116

Name of Ship	Rating	From	To	Character	Efficiency	Date Assessed	Remarks
OPERATIONAL SERVICE FROM 27.10.53 TO 2-6-54							
Cerberus	Ord Sub (RM)	28.9.46	27.11.46	VG.	—	2 Dec 46	Ext. of Birth Certificate sighted
LONSDALE (T) [TORRENS]	"	28.11.46	9.2.47	VG	—	31-12-47	Rated O.D. Sonn. 10 Feb 47 Torrens H5571
—·—·—	O/SEA	10.2.47	15.7.47	VG	SAT	31.12.48.	Rated Radio Mech. 16 Torrens H5436
—·—·—	R.M.	16.7.47	17.7.47	VG	Sat.	31-12-49	Transf. Rad. Elect. Mate (W/T) 1 Jan 48 Watson 181 W/T
RUSHCUTTER (C) [WATSON]	"	18.7.47	30.9.47	VG	Sat	31-12-50	Rated Ldg. Rad. Mech. (W/T) 15 Dec 49 Watson 91 W/T
PLATYPUS (C) L	J	1.10.47	14.12.47				Transf. Ldg. Rad. Elect. Mate (W/T) 1 Jan 48 Watson 91 W/T
—·—·—	LOG/RM (W/T)	15.12.47	31.12.47.				Rated A/R.E. 15 June 49 Canberra House 110455 I.
—·—·—	LOG/R.E.M. (W/T)	1.1.48	24.9.48	VG.	Super	31-12-53.	Embarked Ranchi Pm 28/1/50 passage UK to Aust 29/1/217
CERBERUS (T) [GLADSTONE]	"	25.9.48	3.3.49.				Joined R.E. AIN 14 June 50. Adm 133423 Lt 6/1/40 5'45". June 50
LONSDALE	"	4.3.49	6.4.49.	VG	SUPR.	31-12-55	Confirmed R.E.(L) 15 June 50. Adm 128329/ Lt
LONDON DEPOT	"	7.4.49	16.5.49.				Rating selected for Commission for Instt. AINB051007 Feb 53.
" —·— (ARIEL)		17.5.49	14.6.49				Recommended for promotion to Ldg. 6 Mar 50 E.
—·—·— (ARIEL)	A/RE.	15.6.49	28.6.50				Joined CVT 1 Dec 49 Sydney, 16443 Lt
LONSDALE		29.6.50	22.8.50				Title changed to P.O. R.E.(R).
ALBATROSS	A/RE(A) (14.6.50)	23.8.50	24.8.50				Discharged on promn. to Acting Commissioned Electrical Officer to date 3rd June 1956. NB 0106 14/6/56, 40/8/140/1088.
—·—·—	RE(L) (15.6.50)	25.8.50	19.12.51.				Promoted A/Lieut. (E) (Electrical Officer) A/Rupert to be Lieut. (E) 3 Dec 56 SYDNEY
CERBERUS	"	20.12.51	17.9.52				Furlough: Paid 165-11-1 in lieu 4½ Months
ALBATROSS	"	18.9.52	12.3.53				File 217-23-49.
LONSDALE	"	13.3.53	23.3.53				Card-circle (Tradesman) has been returned here with 21/2/52.
SYDNEY	"	24.3.53					52/31 X 502.



OFFICERS' RECORD OF SERVICE CARD

NAME (BLOCK LETTERS)	CHRISTIAN NAMES (IN FULL)	DECORATIONS AND DEGREES
STEVENS	GEORGE WOODFULL	

HOME PORT	PAY No.	NEAREST KNOWN RELATIVE (IN PENCIL)
SYDNEY.	01362	RELATIONSHIP wife

DATE OF BIRTH	PLACE OF BIRTH	RELIGION	
10th. FEBRUARY, 1929.	WOOLOOWIN, Q.	C of E.	FULL NAME Nancy Shirley

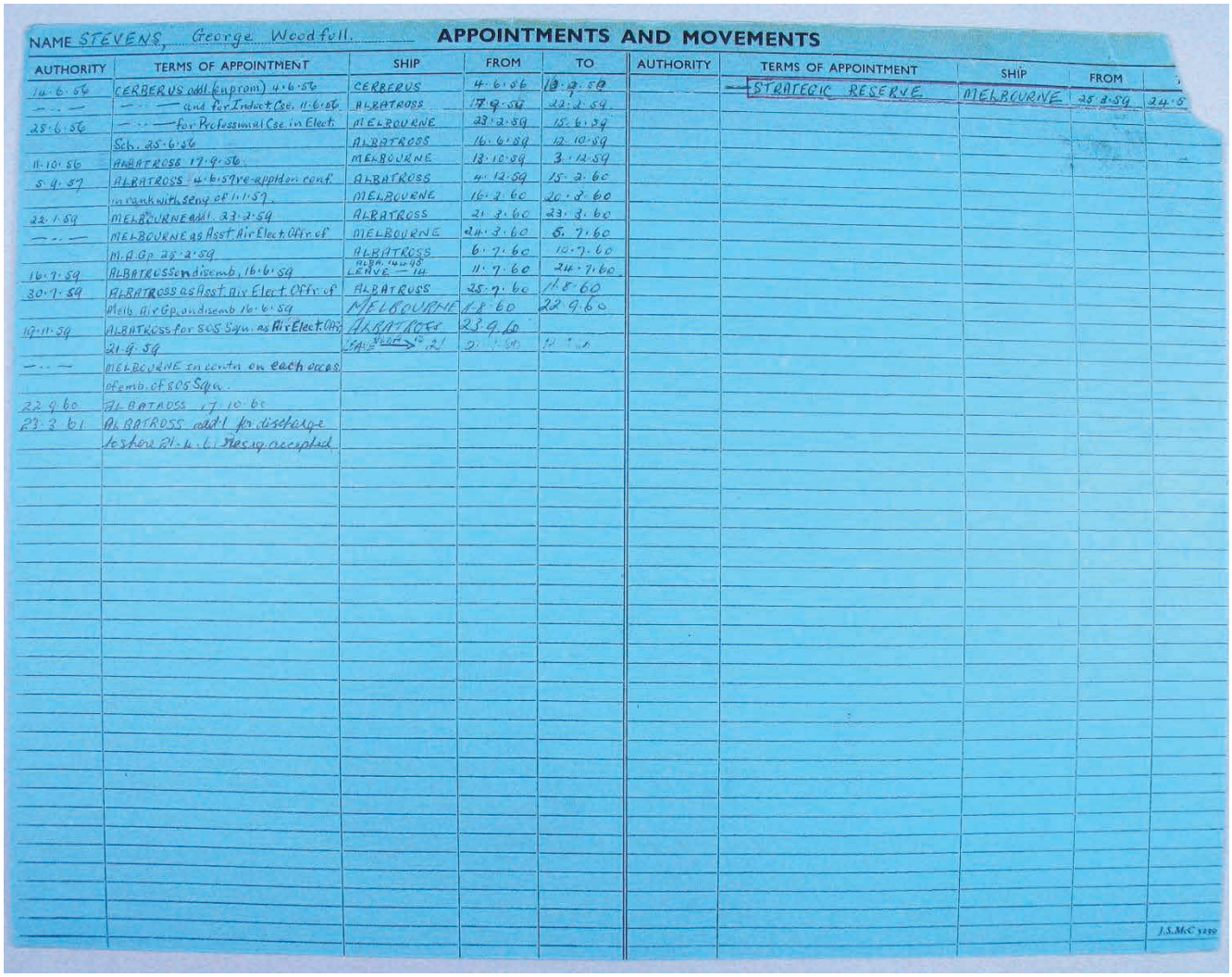
SPECIALIST QUALIFICATIONS	PREVIOUS SERVICE IN ARMED FORCES	
(AR).	Ex. R.O. Radio Elect. (Air) QN K 32734 (Gen. 14.6.49) 24.9.46	ADDRESS Crown St, Hendra, N.S.W.
ADDRESS ON ENTRY	ADDRESS ON DISCHARGE	DATE 21.5.61

STATUS

FILE No.	RANK, ETC.	SENIORITY	DATE	GAZ'AL
	Commission issued (GW 359) 1.7.60.			
4019.140.1085	Promoted COMMISSIONED ELECTRICAL OFFICER (ACTING) and	4.6.56	4.6.56	49/56
CND. 1922.56	ELECTRICAL SUB-LIEUTENANT (G.D.) (ACTING) RAN	1.1.57	1.1.57	32/57
4019.140.1338	CONFIRMED ELECTRICAL SUB-LIEUTENANT, RAN	1.1.57		58/57
351.20.430	Resignation accepted.		21.4.61	22/61

EXAMINATIONS AND MISCELLANEOUS FULL BENEFITS

FILE No.	DATE	REMARKS
		(AR) Qualification.
4007.11.151	17.8.56	Successfully compl. Surys Steward. A RC Trng 79%.
4007.11.146		Trndset C&E 82%
267 23 40	28.10.60	Upward to Court Source for furlough purposes with shipping transport from 22/9/60 - 1/7/61.
351/20/430	3.1.61	Tendered Resignation. Accepted to take 21.0.61
267-23-40	22-4-61	Paid £665 11.1 in Lieu of 4½ months Long Leave.



NAME STEVENS, George Woodfull.

APPOINTMENTS AND MOVEMENTS

AUTHORITY	TERMS OF APPOINTMENT	SHIP	FROM	TO
14·6·56	CERBERUS addl (upromn) 4·6·56	CERBERUS	4·6·56	13·9·56
— · · —	— · · — and for Induct Cse. 11·6·56	ALBATROSS	17·9·56	22·2·59
28·6·56	— · · — for Professional Cse in Elect.	MELBOURNE	23·2·59	15·6·59
	Sch. 25·6·56	ALBATROSS	16·6·59	12·10·59
11·10·56	ALBATROSS 17·9·56.	MELBOURNE	13·10·59	3·12·59
5·9·57	ALBATROSS 4·6·57 re-appln cont'	ALBATROSS	4·12·59	15·2·60
	in rank with Seny of 1·1·57.	MELBOURNE	16·2·60	20·3·60
22·1·59	MELBOURNE addl. 23·2·59	ALBATROSS	21·3·60	23·3·60
— · · —	MELBOURNE as Asst Air Elect Offr of	MELBOURNE	24·3·60	5·7·60
	M.A.Gp 23·2·59	ALBATROSS	6·7·60	10·7·60
16·7·59	ALBATROSS on disemb, 16·6·59	ALBATROSS LEAVE — 14	11·7·60	24·7·60
30·9·59	ALBATROSS as Asst Air Elect Offr of	ALBATROSS	25·7·60	11·8·60
	Melb Air Gp on disemb 16·6·59	MELBOURNE	12·8·60	22·9·60
19·11·59	ALBATROSS for SOS Sqn. as Air Elect Offr	ALBATROSS	23·9·60	
	21·9·59	LEAVE from 12 21	2· · ·60	12· · ·
— · · —	MELBOURNE in contn on each occas			
	of emb. of SOS Sqn.			
22·9·60	ALBATROSS 17·10·60			
23·2·61	ALBATROSS addl for discharge			
	to date 21·4·61 Resig accepted			

AUTHORITY	TERMS OF APPOINTMENT	SHIP	FROM	
—	STRATEGIC RESERVE	MELBOURNE	25·2·59	24·5

J.S.M.C 5220

A.S. 1246z.
(Introduced 1942.)
(Revised 1943.)

(To be kept attached to the Service Certificate until final discharge from the Service.)

NAME STEVENS George Woodfull

Official No. 32734

RADIO MECHANIC'S HISTORY SHEET

I. TRAINING AND EXAMINATION RECORD.

C. H. TENNANT, GOVERNMENT PRINTER. 500—S.443/10/45—16778 St 1131

PRELIMINARY RADIO TRAINING AT ~~MELBOURNE~~ TECHNICAL COLLEGE.

Theory.				Practical.					Total % Final Exam	Initials of Supervising Officer.
Elect. Tech.	Receiving.	Trans-mitting.	Special Oscill.	Test Equip-ment.	Servicing.	Trans-mitter.	Aerials and C.R.O's.	Set Con-struction.		
69	77	60	58	75	55	60	54	52	70	Date. 1/8/47

RESULTS OF NAVAL W/T COURSE.

For Mechanic W/T.	Practical Technical.	Ship or Establishment where Examined.	Initials of Examining Officer.
% Required			
% Obtained			Date.

DATE OF ADVANCEMENT TO LEADING RADIO MECHANIC 15th December 1947 — Initials of Captain

For Leading Radio Mechanic (W/T)	~~Weekly Average.~~ Receivers	~~Theory.~~ Transmitters	Practical. Technical. Transceivers	~~Test Equip-ment.~~ V.H/F.	~~Fault Location.~~ W/T & W/m	D/F	R.C.M.	LORAN	Shore W/T	Practical	Total %	Q. or F.	Ship or Establishment where Examined.	Initials of Examining Officer.
% Required	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				Date.
% Obtained	70	69	61	64	79	86	74	69	59	GOOD		Q	HMAS "WATSON"	7/2/48

Initials of Captain

DATE ADVANCED TO ACTING ~~P.O.~~ RADIO ~~MECHANIC~~ Telegt (a). 15. 6. 49. — Initials of Captain

DATE RECOMMENDED FOR CHIEF P.O. RADIO MECHANIC'S COURSE — Initials of Captain

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY

Certificate for Educational Test I.

THIS IS TO CERTIFY *that*

Radio Electrician (Air) George W. Stevens, O/N.A.32734.

has passed the Educational Test I. Examination, comprising:—

(a) *Writing an ordinary passage of English to Dictation. Writing a letter or an essay in connexion with a specified subject. Rules of Grammar. Explanation in the candidate's own words of the meaning of Orders given in Service Phraseology, passages taken from the King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions, &c.;*

(b) *A paper on the first four rules of Arithmetic, Vulgar and Decimal Fractions, calculation of Averages, Percentages, and Simple Interest, and making out Mess Bills, &c.*

By direction of the Naval Board

Secretary, Naval Board,
Department of the Navy

NAVY OFFICE,
MELBOURNE,
Date, 31st July, 1951.

C.109/48 (Reprinted April, 1948)

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY.

Higher Educational Certificate

A ~~First~~ Second Class Certificate is awarded to

Radio Electrician (A) George W. Stevens.

Official Number A/32734.

	Subjects	Marks (Max. 100)	Date	Intermediate Certificate Standard
1	General Knowledge	-	-	Not applicable.
2	History	-	-	Up to Intermediate Standard, Victoria and New South Wales.
3	Geography	81	April 1954.	Up to Intermediate Standard, Victoria and New South Wales.
4	Navigation	-	-	Not applicable.
5	Practical Mathematics	94	April 1954.	Up to Intermediate Mathematics, Victoria, or Mathematics I New South Wales.
5a	Mathematics (Secretariat Branch)	-	-	
6	Mechanics	70	April 1954	Corresponds to these sections of the Intermediate Physics Paper for Victoria and New South Wales.
7	Magnetism and Electricity	73	April 1954.	
8	English Expression	76	October 1951.	Up to Intermediate Standard, Victoria.

NOTE—A minimum of 75% is equal to a first class pass: 55% is a second class pass, and is up to Intermediate Certificate Standard, as indicated above.

Navy Office,
Melbourne.

this 26th day of April, 1954.

Secretary, Naval Board.

A.S. 450 (Est. 1958)

Officer's Copy

1

OFFICER'S CERTIFICATE

H.M.A.S. Albatross

31st April 1961

This is to certify that Elect. Sub-Lt. G.W. Stevens RAN

has served as Ground Radio Officer in

H/q A Establishment under my command, from the 25th day

of May 1959, to the 31st day of April 1961, during which

period he has conducted himself* to my entire satisfaction.

A keen and sound young Officer.

McMahon — (Signature.)

Captain — (Rank.)

* Here the Captain is to insert in his own handwriting the conduct of the Officer.

A.S. 450

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY.

NAVY OFFICE, CANBERRA, A.C.T.

23rd March, 1961.

To Electrical Sub-Lieutenant G.W. Stevens (AR) R.A.N.

The Naval Board hereby appoints you to Her Majesty's Australian Ship ALBATROSS additional for discharge to shore to date 21st April, 1961, resignation accepted,

and directs you to repair to your duty.

By direction of the Naval Board,

Thos. J. Hawkins

Appendix 7: Employment history

Position	Employer	Period
Merchant Seaman	Department of Shipping and Transport	22 Mar 1945 – 31 May 1946
Merchant Seaman	Union Steam Ship Company	Jun–Aug 1946
Technician, then commissioned officer	Royal Australian Navy	24 Sep 1946 – 21 Apr 1961
Shop assistant	David Jones Ltd	May–Jun 1961
Technician	TCN Channel 9 Ltd	Jul–Aug 1961
Technician then manager	IBM Australia Ltd	Sep 1961 – 31 Jan 1986
Manager	Compaq Computer Australia	1988 – 10 Dec 1989
Employment consultant	Computer Industry Training & Technology Corp.	27 Aug 1990 – 31 Dec 1991
Employment consultant	Grey Power	1992
Employment consultant	Paxus	? – 6 Aug 1993